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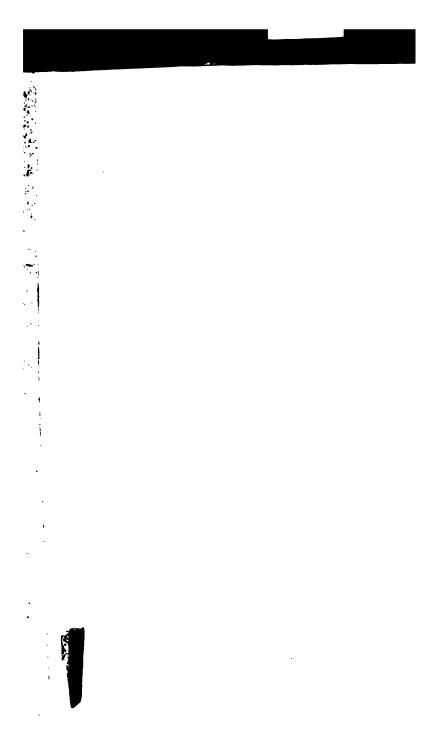
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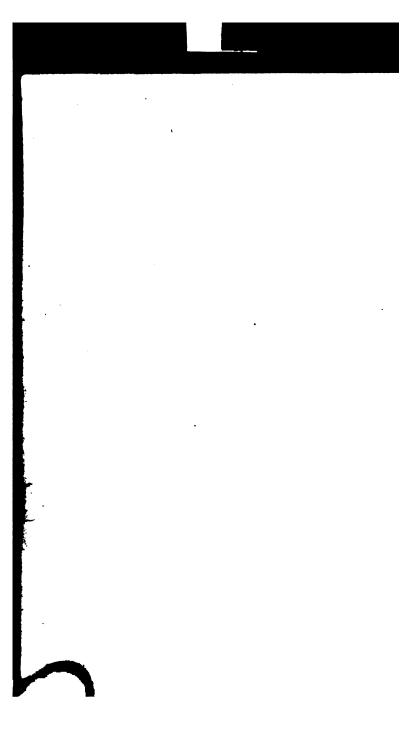
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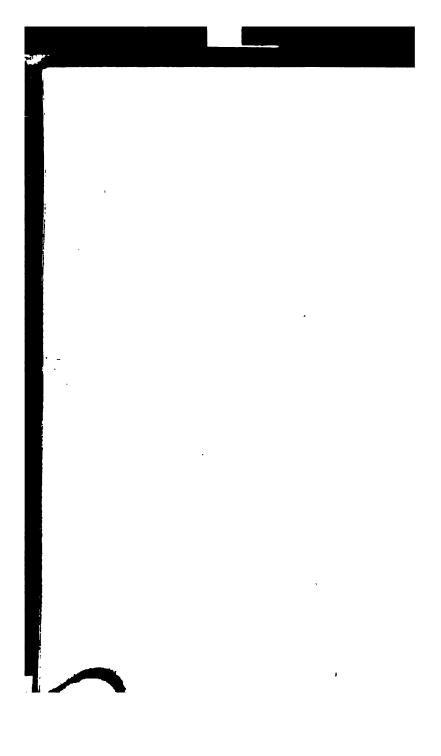




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BY

JAMES HAY, JR.

Author of "The Man Who Forgot,"
"Mrs. Marden's Ordeal," and
"The Winning Clue."



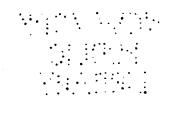
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VAIL-BALLOU COMPANY DIMENANTON AND NEW YORK

TO MY GRANDMOTHER

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Ι

THE WOMAN IN BLACK

RESSED in severely tailored black, the woman, as she turned from the "information" desk toward the great, high-ceiled lobby, was unintentionally conspicuous. To even the habitues of the Wareham, where good-looking women were the rule, she became at once a figure of more than passing interest.

Save the spot of vivid yellow at her throat, there was nothing to mitigate the uncompromising, almost harsh, simplicity of her costume. And yet, the undulating grace of her slow motion stirred the hard lines to a waviness, a curving softness, which indicated that a style not so subdued might have subjected her to the danger of seeming over-dressed — or, perhaps, flamboyant.

It was this effect of great vitality, or unusual emotional power, that drew toward her a second glance from the men and women in the rather thinly populated lobby.

Her face, dead-white under the shadows of her

black hair and hat-brim, justified the curiosity of which, apparently, she was wholly ignorant. It expressed a real indifference to those who regarded her. The unforced calm of her features, as well as the easy authority of her bearing, suggested unmistakably an acquaintance with that class of people ordinarily engaged in the world's larger affairs.

Reaching the two massive sofas set back to back in the centre of the lobby, she paused a moment and glanced at the clock near the entrance to the writing-room. It was then, for the fraction of a second, that something in her expression betrayed her anxious expectancy.

Studying her intently at that moment, one might have concluded that she sought weighty information, or that she had prepared herself for a mission which she recognized as nearly impossible of accomplishment.

If her purpose connected her with people of importance, it was only natural that she had come to the Wareham—"everybody" in Washington went there, for lunch and gossip. Its guests were the best known figures in the capital's official life. She gave no sign, however, of watching for any special person.

It was five minutes past two when she halted at the long sofas. She remained standing, and, spreading open the newspaper she carried, folded it to an inside page devoted to women's "fashions."

At exactly seven minutes past two she sank slowly to a seat on the sofa facing the "writing lounge."

At the same moment Cameron Hough, Assistant Secretary of State, appeared with his luncheon guest at the main exit from the crowded dining-room, directly behind her and half the width of the lobby from her. Deep in discussion, they strolled toward the unoccupied sofa and for a second or two stood near it.

"— and, therefore, nowhere on the seven seas," the pleasing barytone of Hough's friend finished a sentence.

"But I don't see —" began Hough, in the manner of a man surprised by an unexpected topic.

"I ran ahead of my subject," came the quick apology. "Let me explain."

They took possession of the sofa, sitting less than three feet from her. If she had leaned her head back, the brim of her hat would have touched Cameron Hough's neck.

A bellboy, gazing into space, stood fully thirty feet from her. Scarcely moving her head in signal, but with a look that was distinctly imperious, she summoned him.

"I left a number with the telephone operator," she said.

The deep, rich timbre of her voice made the words surprisingly distinct. The Assistant Secretary of State, hearing them, broke a sentence in half.

"See whether she has an answer, please. The number is seven-one-seven."

Behind her the barytone was explaining to the diplomat:

"If we could get this afternoon the authoritative information that Wilson would be an unfailing advocate of her right to trade, to grow rich, to flourish, after peace is made—"

Obviously uninterested, however, the woman studied the "fashion" illustrations. If appearance counted for anything, she was unconscious of their presence.

Twenty minutes later Cameron Hough was informed by his guest:

"The man! Young and impulsive as he is, his amazing knowledge of international affairs makes him invaluable to Wilson. If anybody knows the President's views on this, it's Thayer— John R. Thayer. And what Thayer knows, if he does know, would command, as I've said, any imaginable price in Berlin on any one of the seven days in the week."

A close observer of the woman in black would have said that here she narrowly escaped a nervous start. Although she did not move percepti-

bly, there was, vaguely and intangibly, a change in her posture — a strained, expectant readiness for action.

Laying aside her newspaper, she left the sofa and went to the main entrance, her grace of motion again breaking the harsh lines of her conventual costume into appealing curves. The expression of her face was still one of cool remoteness; but the pupils of her eyes were pinpoints, as if she strove to examine minutely the difficult phases of important work she had contracted to perform.

David Gower, standing on the pavement outside in the shining warmth of mid-May sunlight, gave her the flattery of interested eyes when she descended the steps.

His breathing quickened a little. A questionable animation touched the unwholesome, pastelike whiteness of his face. As she drove away, alone in a seven-passenger car, he stood there, watching her out of sight. He pulled with nervous fingers at the short-clipped moustache that was like a black gash struck into the pallor of his features. He was smiling unpleasantly.

Entering the hotel, he went to the register clerk's desk.

There he made inquiry.

"Oh!" the clerk said. "The one in black?"

[&]quot;Yes; yellow at her throat."

"Let me see." The register was consulted. "Here it is — Miss Newman."

He turned the book, and Gower glanced at the signature, Miss Zimony Newman.

"Zeemony," he said. "Registered as being from Washington, didn't she?"

He lit a fresh cigarette, and, leaning an elbow on the desk, assumed a confidential attitude. Words and smoke came simultaneously past his heavy lips.

- "Ever see her before?"
- "No: never did."

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- "Any chance of finding out where she went?"
- "She paid her bill and checked out about half an hour ago," said the clerk. "Let me see."

He investigated.

"Yes, sir. She sent her baggage to the Melwood — the Melwood apartments on Eighteenth Street."

Gower's breathing quickened again.

"I guessed right!" he exulted inwardly. "There are pleasant days ahead!"



II

MISS NEWMAN'S THREE CALLERS

ENATOR BRANDON was uneasy as he looked at the younger man, lounging loose-jointed and shirt-sleeved in the big leather chair. They were alone in Senator Thayer's private office.

In spite of electric fans, it was oppressively warm. Mopping his smooth-shaven, ruddy face, he went to the window overlooking the east plaza of the Capitol.

"You know my affection for John," he said at last, his back to Dr. Thayer.

"I should say so!" The agreement was enthusiastic.

"And my admiration, my pride in his influence in the Senate—"

Brandon stopped again and stared at the plaza, watching the waves of heat thrown off by the asphalt. Heat and humidity, the combination that plagues Washington most severely in mid-August, blanketed the city. The afternoon sky was a shield of brass, glowing hot, solid.

The senator thought: "I've chosen a bad time. This weather doesn't stop at breaking men's bodies. It burns into their morale." He turned from the outside glare. Larry Thayer's lazy, cordial smile failed to hide completely the look of weakness about his mouth. Brandon, impressed by it now, as if he had never seen it before, prolonged his silence.

"There are," he began, "a few things, a very few things, about which no man should talk to another."

Thayer, his smile gone, waited.

"Do you see Miss Newman, Miss Zimony Newman, often?"

"Pretty often," Thayer answered, bewildered.

"I thought so. Ever hear, Larry, that she — ever hear anything about her, particularly, er — ah — specifically?"

Larry kept himself well in hand, helped to it by a gratitude he could not forget: his brother owed much to the old man.

Brandon, walking slowly from the window to a chair in front of Thayer, continued in a tone strikingly sympathetic.

"I was at the Department of Justice the other day, Larry — I've some good friends there. So has John. They told me — well, if I were you, I'd quit so much of this attention to Miss Newman. Fact, Larry — I would."

He was finding coherence difficult. He mopped his forehead again. Thayer, a fine tremor in his fingers, waited for him to finish.

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"It seems absurd," he took up the hard going;
"we Americans have always laughed at the 'spy
menace,' but it's here. Felix Conrad has made a
good fight in that direction. He's proved his
case. Spies are a real danger. I'll tell you
about it."

Leaving the building an hour later, Larry Thayer raged inwardly:

"And what about her? 'That's a secret'— is it? They can bring me that stuff, and she isn't to know!— gets no chance to deny it! I'll see 'em in hall first!"

The heat, which according to Senator Brandon had burned into men's morale that afternoon, did not diminish with the coming of night. Skies that were brass at sunset changed to malleable iron, hot and close to the earth. In parks and streets the scorched leafage of the trees stood out still, like patterns of embroidery, against the deeper black of the horizon.

Within doors, even in apartment houses as roomy as the Melwood, fans fought in vain the warm sogginess. Apathy was everywhere, except when tempers gave way, revealing long-hidden secrets of personality.

This was why Harry Fields, negro elevator boy at the Melwood, remembered afterwards the man who had been calling on Miss Newman. Tall and powerfully built, he stepped into the car at the third floor, looking as cool and fresh as if he had been braced by the tang of late October. Twirling a panama hat on his fore-finger and whistling in a low key, he was the one individual, Harry decided, untouched that night by the city's killing heat. He was eloquent of energy.

"I told Miss Newman," he said, thrusting a dollar into the boy's hand, "I'd have you get her some ice cream."

"Sorry, boss," Harry refused, "but dey'd fire me sutt'in ef I wuz to leave de buildin'."

"That so?"

The tall man, not troubling to recover his dollar, put on his hat and drew out his watch as the car stopped at the ground floor.

"Let's see. Nine-twenty-six now — nine-twenty-six," he calculated. "Time enough. Taxioutside?"

"Yas, suh."

" Drug store at the next corner — isn't there?"

"Yas, suh; Eighteenth and K."

"Fair enough! I'll get it myself and still make the train."

He hurried out, called to the taxi driver that he would be ready in a few minutes and strode rapidly down the street. Returning with the ice cream, he stepped, jaunty and agile, into the elevator. He took out his watch again.

"Nine-thirty-four," he calculated a second time. "Nine-twenty-six from nine-thirty-four eight minutes for that trip—and enough time left to catch the train."

Reaching the third floor, he was greeted by the sound of a phonograph, the high notes of a grand opera soprano ringing out, somehow grotesque in the sweltering and otherwise lifeless building. The music came from No. 35, Miss Newman's apartment, the permanent door of which stood open.

The tall man, hurrying down the corridor, rapped once with his knuckles on the edge of the wire-screen door, waited a moment and then pulled it open. The doorway, forming a part of the end wall of the corridor, gave Harry Fields, who stood, lazy and sag-shouldered, just outside the waiting elevator, an unobstructed view of Miss Newman's dimly lit, narrow passage. He could see also a small section of the living room, or reception room, into which the passage led.

Inside this narrow hall, the caller struck the left side of his head against the square glass covering that had swung away from the dial of an old-fashioned grandfather's clock. He swung the glass into place and, after fumbling with the

catch, fastened it securely. From that, he went into the reception room and stopped the phonograph.

With the parcel still in his left hand, he returned to the passage, halting and bending over slightly to call to Miss Newman through the closed door of her bedroom.

"Don't bother! Haven't a minute," he said, his bass voice clear and vibrant.

Miss Newman's reply was not audible to Harry.

"I'll put it on the table here," he called. "Don't mention it!-If it refreshes you, fine!"

At the outside door he paused to fling over his shoulder:

"Yes; plenty! Good-bye."

He let the wire-screen slam behind him, and, in a gait that was almost a run, came down the corridor and into the elevator. Reaching the ground floor, he made a rush for the taxi.

"Talk 'bout pep!" the coloured boy communed aloud. "Heat ain' nevuh goin' touch dat man. If he l's hot as dey say, it sutt'inly will be nuts foh him!'

A few minutes later — at a quarter to ten another tall man entered the Melwood and, going to the telephone alcove at his right, asked for Miss Newman. He gave his name as Senator Thayer. Seeing, however, that the boy's movements were a tribute to the enervating power of the heat, he did not wait to be announced.

"I'll go up," he said. "Miss Newman is expecting me."

Harry followed him into the elevator and, exerting himself only enough to push the shaft door partially shut, started the car.

"What's the number of Miss Newman's apartment?" the senator inquired.

"Thirty-five, suh; third flo'," replied Harry, and volunteered: "I b'lieve she done retired foh de night."

"Hardly," the visitor objected, leaving the elevator.

His demeanour was in direct contrast with that of the powerfully built man who had brought the ice cream. He was quick in both movement and speech, but it was a quickness suggestive of worry, even apprehension.

Harry, regaining the switchboard, communed further:

"Ain' nothin' like his brothuh. Humph! His brothuh ain' no man 'tall 'longside dis man!" Ten minutes later the elevator bell rang.

Harry, stopping the car at the third floor, found the senator awaiting him with the query:
"Miss Newman out — do you know?"

"Naw, suh. Leas'ways she ain' come down in de elevatuh."

The senator hesitated, handkerchief to his collar.

"That's strange," he said. "She specified nine-forty-five." He addressed Harry directly: "Do you know whether she might be in another apartment in the house?"

"Naw, suh. She don' visit roun'."

Senator Thayer debated a moment longer.

"Funny," he worried, finally stepping into the elevator. "Here; I'll leave my card. I wish you'd tell her Senator Thayer waited ten minutes—called at nine-forty-five—please."

At the telephone alcove he stopped.

"Please tell Miss Newman," he elaborated the message slowly, "I called promptly at nine-forty-five. No one answered my ring; but, finding the door open, I went into her reception room to wait — I was so certain that she expected me and would appear. After waiting a full ten minutes, I left. You'll remember that?"

"Yas, suh."

The senator's slow, emphatic speech impressed Harry, gave him the idea that there was in the message something of unusual importance; that he must repeat every word of it to Miss Newman.

He went back to his switchboard, talking to

himself in a low tone, fixing in his mind the facts and figures Thayer had given him. He would remember. He always remembered things for Miss Newman. She was kind to him, with words as well as tips.

Half-asleep again, he was startled by the rush of a human body through the Melwood entrance, past the telephone alcove and down the corridor. As he, too, sprang into the corridor, he caught a glimpse of a medium-sized, stocky man with his foot on the first step of the stairway.

In a flash the running man was out of sight, the "pat-pat" of his light-soled shoes scarcely audible as he took the steps two at a bound. Harry had recognized him. He was Frederick Marcello, the artist.

What the boy did not know was that Marcello had been standing for a long time under the trees directly across the street from the Melwood and had seen the entrances and exits of the two men who had called on Miss Newman.

Harry, going back to his chair, looked at the clock above the switchboard. It was ten o'clock.

A quarter of an hour later the elevator bell rang again. He raised his head slowly from the pillow of his arms. The bell was still ringing. Without intermission, it kept up a gong-like call.

"Let him ring," thought the boy sulkily. "Ef

he coul' run up so peart, he kin run down ef he's in a hurry."

The ringing continued, as if the impatient summoner had fallen against the button and kept his weight on it. Harry, refusing the labour of haste, ran the car to the third floor.

It was as he had expected. Even after he slid open the shaft door, Marcello still leaned against the button. Harry, catching sight of the man's features, suddenly threw off his laziness. With a familiarity born of fear, he caught hold of the artist's shoulder, and was at once more frightened by the feel of it, twitching under his fingers.

"Whut's de mattuh?" he squeaked, removing by force Marcello's hand from the bell button. "Whut's de mattuh?"

The artist's lips curled, taking queer shapes in his attempts to speak.

"Doc-tor!" he said at last, looking once over his shoulder toward No. 35.

Harry started down the corridor, but Marcello clung to him.

"Doc-tor!" he repeated harshly, putting most of his weight on the coloured boy. "Miss Newman — sick — awful!"

He pushed Harry toward the stairway.

"Get doctor! Go after doctor!" he kept saying.

Perspiration streamed from his hair and face.

Blood was on the back of his right hand. His eyes stared, like a hysterical woman's.

The boy sprang from his grasp and into the elevator. As the car went down, he heard Marcello going with weak, uneven steps back toward No. 35.

Dr. Riley, whose offices and bachelor apartments were on the ground floor, had come in half an hour ago. Harry, remembering that the physician had a telephone extension at the head of his bed, ran to the switchboard.

The answer was prompt:

"I'll come at once."

The doctor, in dressing gown and slippers, appeared within a few seconds. Harry followed him from the elevator to Miss Newman's apartment.

Through the screen door they could see Marcello's profile. He sat in a wicker rocking chair, moving his body from side to side in a series of involuntary jerks. His features, noticeably his lips, were beyond his control. He brushed his forehead and face with his hands continuously, scraping away the perspiration.

His eyes alone were steady, fixed on the heavy, dark-green curtains of an alcove which extended from the right-hand end of the mantel to the further wall. More exactly, his gaze was on the yellow-slippered toe and silk-clad arch of a

woman's foot projecting from beneath the hangings.

The foot, stationary as a piece of furniture, was something from which he could not take his eyes.

Dr. Riley, rolling back the heavy curtain, its rings rattling against the rod, disclosed the figure of a woman on the floor. It was then that Marcello shifted his glance. After looking at her once, he closed his eyes and, with a groan he did not try to suppress, covered his face with his hands.

Miss Newman lay full-length on her back. Her head and the right arm, curved above her head, rested on the edge of a drawing portfolio. She was in full evening dress — yellow satin with small, black bows at her corsage, and a narrow black girdle. Her left arm was parallel with her body and supported by the bare floor of the alcove.

Over the left cheek bone was an abrasion which had been bleeding. The doctor, however, located the principal wound in her breast, a little below the line of her corsage and just above the left breast. From this, the flow of blood had been, and was now, excessive, staining the satin in a splotch that widened and grew larger toward the floor. Partly hidden by her arm, a dark pool had formed on the floor and was spreading.

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Riley, instantly on his knees beside her, saw that she had been stabbed and that the knife, slanting downward toward the heart, had narrowly missed the aorta, if, in fact, the aorta had not been punctured.

"Quick!" he directed over his shoulder. "Some towels - warm water!"

He was already opening his instrument case.

It was the coloured bay who answered his order with action. Marcello, picking at one hand with the fingers of the other, looked about shiftily, fright flaming in his eyes.

"And a teaspoon --- any kind of spoon," Riley added.

Looking around, he saw Marcello.

"Wake up!" he said crisply. "Hurry, man! A teaspoon."

Harry, returning with towels and a basin of water, set them on the floor and ran for the spoon.

The artist did not move. He managed a hoarse question:

"Is she alive?"

"Certainly," Riley said, and gave him a quick look.

Even in that momentary glance he saw blood on the right side of Marcello's face, smeared by the restless right hand. There was more of it on his hand than on his cheek. On the floor, at his feet, was another splotch. Riley saw now that a trail of blood-spots led from where the woman lay to the door of her bedroom.

Harry Fields came down the passage from the kitchenette, bringing the spoon.

"Call the Emergency hospital ambulance," Riley instructed. "And get a — ask some woman to come in here — quick!"

His sure, slender fingers busy with the wound, he questioned the artist:

"How long ago - when did you find her?"

Marcello did not answer. Instead, Harry Fields, who had started into the passage but changed his mind and turned into the bedroom, made an announcement:

"Hyuh, boss - dis thing!"

He handed the doctor a long, sharp-pointed paper-knife on which blood had already begun to congeal.

"I foun' it in de bedroom dar, jes' inside de do'."

Riley took it from him and ordered: "Hurry up! Do that 'phoning."

Marcello made no sound except the creaking of the wicker chair in which he constantly moved.

"Well!" the doctor asked him again. "When did you find her?"

"Just then," he replied after another pause.
"I don't know — exactly. It seems a — years.
What is it — exactly?"

Riley, changing his attitude for easier manipulation of the wound, saw a bloodstain on the top of the artist's white canvas shoe, the right shoe. This, more than anything else he had noted, suggested Marcello's probable guilt.

But why and how Miss Newman's present position? He had seen that the right-hand curtain was torn from two of the rod rings. Had Marcello done that in his first, blind impulse to try to hide what he thought was a dead body? Or had she, on the point of losing consciousness, reached out and grasped it in an attempt to keep from falling?

Her posture was not altogether indicative of a fall. It was possible that she had reeled and plunged through the curtains where they overlapped each other, and that they had swung together again, hiding everything but one of her feet.

On the other hand, if Marcello had not stabbed her and carried her across the reception room, how could he have had the bloodspot on the top of his shoe? If it had not dropped from her wound, what was the explanation of its being there? If it had dropped from the wound, he had moved her while she was unconscious, or he had been with her when she received the wound or immediately afterwards — at a time certainly

when she was capable of sitting or standing upright.

Harry came down the hall, followed by a woman from the next-door apartment.

- "Harry!" ordered Riley, not lifting his head, more uneasy now for his patient's life. "Call the police!"
 - "Boss, I done call dat ambulance onct!"
- "I know," the doctor said sharply. "And what I want now is the police."

He heard Marcello leaving the chair.

- "You're not going out, are you?" His words were advice.
- "Yes yes." The artist was hesitant, hazy mentally.
- "I wouldn't. Harder to explain all this tomorrow than it is tonight."
- "I hadn't ah that's kind of you. Not running away - I wasn't running away, you know, doctor. Guess you're right."

He returned to the wicker chair.

III

"THEY WILL ACCUSE ME"

R. FELIX CONRAD had acquainted himself with all the details of the Melwood tragedy — that is to say, all the details published in four morning newspapers. Leaning far back in his desk chair now, he stared at the dark-paneled ceiling of his study. He devoted himself, with some difficulty, to calm and analytical thought.

How would this affair across the street affect him, Mr. Conrad, a gentleman wealthy from the manufacture of soap and a "figure" in the national capital's Society?

That he considered the crime as interesting only in so far as it might annoy him or provide him with an opportunity for self-exploitation, was in perfect accord with his mental habits. It was the Conrad method of dealing with life.

He wasted no time contemplating the two outstanding results of the crime: that Zimony Newman, still unconscious, was in the Emergency Hospital, close to death; and that Frederick Marcello, a frequenter of his house, had been arrested, charged with the assault. Circumstances

such as those were not his special concern.

What could Felix Conrad get out of the tragedy? He gave it further thought, and, discovering numerous answers, discarded each one the moment it was formulated.

His face showed a dissatisfaction bordering on wrath. That, of itself, was worthy of note. The Conrad face had never been the unedited story of the Conrad thoughts.

His daughter's voice in the hall outside brought his soliloquy to an end. She, like himself, was up early this morning, still somewhat shaken by last night's discovery of the attempted murder. Although his house opened on I Street, the Eighteenth Street windows looked out on the Melwood front entrance directly opposite. Consequently, they had heard the alarm and seen the crowd assemble.

He opened the study door and called her, his voice low and matter-of-fact:

"Rosalie."

She came down the hall and stood in the doorway, dressed in white, with a white hat, ready for the street.

"Going out — so early?"

He looked at his watch. It was not yet nine o'clock.

"I was waiting for John."

His features, unlike his voice, did not entirely

conceal his anxiety. This surprised her. The thin lips, compressed more than usual, the contracted pupils of his eyes and the frown wrinkling his strikingly convex forehead, announced his irritability. She had never, in all her memory of him, seen him so disturbed.

From childhood she had regarded him — he had taught her to regard him — as emotionally inscrutable. He had lived up to his tenet that demonstrativeness was vulgar, a lack of balance peculiar to weak, unimportant people. Affection and its ceremonial had had no place in his house.

She wondered what had struck him so heavily.

"Oh!" he said, resuming his seat at the desk. "Thayer coming here?"

"Yes; just for a moment. Then, I'm going to Mary Fontaine's."

She came further into the room and closed the door.

"Mary Fontaine's!"

"Why, yes."

He sat up very straight, his head held high and a little flung back, so that he achieved an air of distinction.

"I'm going to ask you," he said, his utterance still calm, the words deliberate, as if he discussed something neutral, "not to go to Mrs. Fontaine's."

"Why not?"

She tried not to show her astonishment. Standing across the desk from him, she watched him intently. His long, thin face, bordered at the forehead by sparse light hair, looked at that moment all of its sixty years.

"Mrs. Fontaine's advertised in every newspaper in the country this morning — have you seen the morning papers?"

"Yes."

- "Then, you saw it. She's advertised as the bosom friend of the Newman woman."
 - "But I don't see --"
- "And," he interrupted. "The Newman woman's a German spy."
- "But Mary's 'phoned me. She's in terrific distress, frantic."
 - "Probably," he said, grimly.

She felt the unreasonableness of his demand.

- "Why do you say Zimony Newman is a spy?" she asked, impatient.
- "Who is she this beautiful, charming Zimony Newman?" he retorted.
 - "What do you mean, father?"
- "What's her history? Who is she?" he repeated, his manner an accusation.

For an instant, Rosalie had the impression that he could have answered the question better than she, or that he thought he could.

"She's from Chicago, has lived there ever

since she was a year old; and she was born in Hungary — she's always known clever, delightful people. Is that what you mean?"

"And that's all you know—all she's made known!"

His excitement impressed her anew as childish. She could arrive at no explanation of it. His thinly chiselled nostrils expanded. His eyes were all at once as blue and hard as blue china. When he answered her, his jaw moved so little that he had the appearance of speaking through gritted teeth; but the words fell, cool and exact, their precision reflecting his life-long habit of self-control.

- "Of course, she's a spy. When the Department of Justice makes such a charge through the newspapers, you're safe in believing it! And you know my constant criticism of the Division of Investigation for failure to run down these German agents. Do you think it's pleasing to me to have you written up as the comforting friend of the friend of this Newman woman? Why, the thing's ridiculous!"
- "You mean you want me to desert a friend in trou —"
- "If you've so much sympathy to give, give it to me," he broke in. "Don't forget I'm a German-American."

"You're always saying that!" she objected. "And it's silly. Why say it now?"

"Because I never forget it! I've spent money, worked day and night, to call attention to these traitors. And yet, a little thing, an attack on a woman who knows my daughter, may be enough to make people doubt my sincerity!"

"Why, father!" she gasped, comprehending at last. "You're afraid of ridicule, because I know Zimony!"

"Listen to me," he demanded. "Consider these facts: the Newman woman will probably die; Marcello, a friend of mine, is under arrest for the assault, although innocent—the plan to liberate him on bail this morning proves him innocent; John Thayer, your reputed fiancé, was in Miss Newman's apartment a few minutes before the crime was discovered; Dr. Thayer, your future brother-in-law, is infatuated with her; and now, this morning, you talk of rushing out to console Mrs. Fontaine, the closest friend the woman has! You want to do that when Thayer, about to marry into my family, will be charged with the crime unless it's fixed on another man, so far unknown!"

His breathing was audible, whistling through distended nostrils, a puzzling contradiction of the smooth current of his speech.

"Laugh at me! Why, I'm the joke of Wash-

ington. Imagine what they'll say at the Wareham today! 'Spies,' they'll say, 'perch on his doorstep waiting, like sparrows in winter, to be fed!'"

His distress overcame her.

"Very well," she yielded. "I won't go. I'll send her a message."

Even that, she saw, did not mollify him. Before he could put his opposition into words, the butler came in, bringing her a card — Senator Thayer's.

"Very well, Whipple," she said, glad of the interruption. "Where is the senator?"

"The small drawing-room, Miss Conrad."

"That Thayer?" her father asked.

" Yes."

"I'd like to see him before he leaves — and you."

Thayer was at one of the Eighteenth Street windows, looking at the group of newspaper reporters and photographers in front of the Melwood. She stood on the threshold, a moment hesitant, conscious of some vague, new pride in him as she caught sight of his silhouette, the strong, masterful, white-clad figure, against the glare of outside light.

"Oh, John!" she said, scarcely above a whisper, and went toward him, her hands open, reaching out to him. He met her in the middle of the

room, and stood a long moment, his hands holding hers.

He found it impossible to speak.

"What is it?" she asked.

He looked tired, exhausted.

"Nothing. I — I felt I must come — first to you — and —"

His voice shook. The lack of self-control surprised and irritated him.

She saw at once his self-impatience, and, dropping her hands from his with a final, reassuring pressure, led the way out of the room, past the enigmatic Whipple, across the hall and into the "blue drawing-room."

He followed her down the long room to the deep, silk-cushioned chairs by the low window. Outside, the grass of the garden, not yet touched by the sun, was wet and cool. Dew, like thousands of sparkling beads, clung to the white roses.

"I want you to know, first from me," he said, when they had sat down facing each other, so close that their knees almost touched, "they'll accuse me of this — this murder, it may be."

"Yes?" She was careful not to seem sorry for him. "If they do?"

"It will be hard on you. Nothing but notoriety, and pursuit by the newspapers for days, perhaps months!" She startled him by laughing — a musical, prolonged laugh, with no pretence in it.

"Who cares about newspapers? Anyway, our engagement's to be announced tomorrow."

He made a swift gesture of negation.

"Yes, now — more than ever, I'm determined."

"People wouldn't understand," he objected.

"They'd say you'd done it to encourage me, in my difficulty."

"If they knew you'd talked like this," she flung back, laughter bubbling in her voice again, "they'd doubt your chivalry!"

At that, he surrendered, forced to it by the trouble with his throat, or his tongue, he did not know which. He looked at her and tried to smile. Finally, he attained utterance:

"I might have known — I did know — you'd say that."

His voice, coloured by anxiety, thrilled her. It gave her a new insight, a clearer comprehension of how he worshipped her loveliness.

But she was still laughing as she said, "Stupid!" and added: "You've so much to tell me!"

Her heart sang. Her refusal to be sorry for him or to permit him to be sorry for her had restored his balance.

"Yes," he answered her; "a great deal to tell.

I've been sitting here, wasting time wondering what words to use. Now it seems very easy."

His eyes were still solemn. He had not lost sight of the seriousness of his position.

"It's this: I'm going to work on this case myself — as a detective."

"But I don't understand why you need do it, John.—Why?"

"Because, sooner or later, if the thing remains a mystery, I'll be accused of it; and I prefer to save my reputation myself."

She was puzzled by his unqualified assumption that he would be accused.

"Think a moment," he explained. "I, according to the facts so far known, am the man who last saw her alive, or at least had the last opportunity to see her alive. Her first caller, whoever he was — nobody knows yet — is innocent. She started the phonograph while he was getting ice cream for her; and she talked to him about his train time as he was leaving. Stabbed and dying women don't do those things.

"Marcello is innocent; but — and this is more important — he didn't see her alive last night. You see what that means. I'm the man, the only person, who could have seen her alive after the first caller's departure and before Marcello's arrival.—And there's the note."

"What note?"

"She had sent me a note, making the appointment for last evening."

She waited for him to continue.

"I've given Major Ross a copy of it. Here's the original."

She read it.

- "My dear Senator Thayer: Nothing but urgent necessity could induce me to write this note. Your brother has information he got from you or from associating with you. You, no doubt, realize the gravity of the situation when I tell you that I only I can save him from terrific consequences. Even that requires your co-operation. Won't you come to my apartment, the Melwood, at a quarter to ten tomorrow evening?— Yours sincerely, Zimony Newman.
- "P. S. There must be no reference to the evening at Mrs. Beale Jackson's."

Rosalie Conrad gave it back to him.

- "I can't see that it changes anything, one way or the other."
- "No; except for bringing Larry into it. The next charge will be that she encouraged Larry's attentions to get from him anything he might have got from me; and, failing there, she turned her attention to me."
 - "But she isn't a spy! I know her!"

"That's what I said—at first. It's what Larry says, of course. He's very much in love with her. He and I talked for hours—until daylight."

"But you think she is a spy?"

"Yes," he said, finding it hard to admit, even to her.

" Why?"

"The reference in her note to Mrs. Beale Jackson's," he answered, more reluctant still. "She tried—I suppose you'd say she tried," he struggled with the statement, feeling ridiculous, "—tried to fascinate me."

"Don't look so disgusted!" Rosalie was laughing. "It wasn't a crime!"

"Oh!" he said, contemptuous. "The way she went about it!"

He was suddenly aware of the tribute of her look. He had said to her once that, when she wanted to express profound emotion, her eyes spoke more clearly, more persuasively, than her lips. And, seeing in them now the reflection of her trust, he remembered how, when he had first seen her, their beauty had charmed him.

Thinking of that, he recalled also his absurd happiness in the discovery that her mother had been a Frenchwoman. That explained why she was suggestive of flowers and laughter, why she had no heavy, sombre philosophy of life. Rosalie thought a moment.

"Oh!" she said, enlightened. "She wanted to captivate you for — because of what you knew about the President's ideas on after-war commerce!"

"There!" he said. "You see it! And the public, the papers, will see it, and ask: Why should this senator, so close to the White House, be mixed up with a spy; why should he and his brother call on her?"

"Nobody will say that — nobody who knows you!"

She took his right hand in both of her hands and clasped it tight.

"For ever and ever, John," she said, her eyes moist and yet like amethysts, violet-purple; "forever, you are, to me and for me, the white soul of truth."

He exclaimed, only half-articulate, and, bending forward, swept her into his arms.

"You see," he warned her at last, "how unfortunately for me all this is timed: my primary two weeks off. It strikes at my love, honour, political life—"

They were aware of Whipple, discreetly audible at the other end of the room. Senator Thayer was wanted on the telephone.

"Who is it?" she asked, provoked by her intuitive uneasiness.

"Mr. Jefferson Hastings."

"In a moment, Whipple," Thayer said. He turned to Rosalie: "Hastings, the Department of Justice."

When he took up the telephone receiver, she was at his side.

- "This is Senator Thayer," he said.
- "Good morning, Senator," the voice on the wire answered. "I'd like to see you. I think we'd better get together right away.— My name's Hastings, Division of Investigation."
 - "What is it?"
- "A little matter bearing on last night's ah trouble."
 - "Where are you?"
 - "Apartment thirty-five, the Melwood."
 - "I'll be over at once."

He hung up the receiver, and turned to Rosalie.

- "Hastings," he announced, with the look of competent strength she knew. "I'll go at once."
- "John," she said, standing very straight, looking up to meet his glance, "there's one thing you must face, the only weak spot in all this."
 - "What?"
- "Why did you go to the Melwood last night?" She had brought this up so that he would be prepared to answer anybody who might ask it. There was no intimation that she doubted but a desire that no one should have ground for doubt.

He hesitated.

"You see?" she impressed it upon him. "Why should a senator have complied with the terms of that note?"

"People will say," he replied, "I went because I was afraid my brother had revealed—had talked unwisely. But it wasn't that, Rosalie. I preferred to silence her, to have done with her angling for me and for Larry."

She was thinking that he had always had the burden of looking after his brother — that Larry had come to Washington only two years ago and enjoyed a fair medical practice now simply because of John Thayer's brilliant reputation.

"I'm so glad." She dismissed the subject. They walked slowly to the door.

"Tell me," she said, when he had his hand on the knob; "where will you start? Who do you think stabbed her?"

He looked at her a long time, thinking.

"Your father's secretary," he said at last.

"That man!"

"Yes; David Gower."

"Why — but it's impossible!" she breathed.

"I don't know." He was arguing with himself. "I shall see. We shall see.— And my suspicion is my secret, yours and mine."

"Of course."

He bent quickly and kissed her forehead.

In a moment he was gone. She stood alone in the hall.

David Gower, her father's secretary—could it be possible? She recalled her father's unprecedented excitement and anger. Did he, too, suspect Gower and foresee that the crime would be brought closer to him than the newspapers had hinted—his secretary dealing with, and at last trying to murder, a German spy!

She went to the study. Conrad was not there. On his desk pad he had scribbled three lines:

"Rosalie: am out for few minutes with Gower. By no means, leave house before hearing from me. Vital."

She guessed at once that he and his secretary were in Zimony Newman's apartment, waiting for John Thayer. And her father disliked Thayer, was jealous of him because of her.

"If you only knew — only knew, my dear!" She breathed the words like a prayer. "If only you could know, John, how I shall try to help you!"

IV

THE ACCUSATION

R. JEFFERSON HASTINGS, of the bureau of investigation, Department of Justice, stood at Miss Zimony Newman's bedroom window and examined with critical eye the exterior of Felix Conrad's residence across the street. Completing that scrutiny, he went into the reception room and seated himself in a morris chair.

He was fifty-two years old and round-shouldered; and, since he wore "store clothes," the corners of his coat in front hung half-way to his knees, while the back of this garment "kicked up," too short to hide the bagginess of his trousers in, and at, every particular. This was a peculiarity of all of Mr. Hastings' clothes: they bagged and hung loosely and flapped and overlapped all over him.

It was, also, a peculiarity of his person. His cheeks even had the same tendency. They sagged, reaching a little below the lower jaw-bone.

In other words, Jefferson Hastings was a leisurely, fleshy, even-tempered gentleman, a

philosopher of parts, one who wore steel-rimmed spectacles and took the world as it came.

From a capacious pocket in his coat he drew a piece of wood, soft white pine, ten inches long and four inches in diameter. Another large receptacle furnished forth a pocket knife, a hefty, horn-handled, barlow-esque weapon, its one long blade ground to "split a hair."

Pulling a waste-basket toward him, he held it between his knees, so that, when he began to whittle, it caught the "whittlings." Hastings was himself at last, thinking deeply.

He whittled, even after Major Ross, chief of the police force of the District of Columbia, had entered the apartment, spruce in the uniform of the regular army, brisk, dynamic in his gestures, a disciple of "efficiency," and — twenty minutes late for his appointment with the representative of the federal government.

"A book detective," Hastings had characterized him in their conference the night before.

"There ain't any feud on between him and himself," he reaffirmed now his previous judgment, whittling deep and grimacing furiously. "Bet he'll begin to talk about clues in less than a minute."

"Anything new, Mr. Hastings?" Ross inquired, obviously expecting nothing.

Hastings did not disappoint him.

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" Nothing."

"Suppose, then, I run over the clues we can give the reporters when I leave here?"

"All right."

The major counted them off on his fingers, squeezing each finger-tip for emphasis:

"We've found in this apartment the following interesting facts: one revolver, Smith and Wesson Forty-four Special, equipped with silencer, apparently not used recently, all chambers loaded; bloodstains on bed and on the floor of bedroom; distinct trail of bloodstains on rugs and floor from the bed to the alcove in this room; a bloodspot on right-hand curtain of alcove, and this curtain torn loose from two of its rings; and—ahem!—ah—"

The chief's tongue had outrun his brain.

"That contraption over there," the old man volunteered, pointing with his knife to the floor near the phonograph. "Looks like a sling, made out of ribbon and lace."

"Nothing to that," the chief said, unimpressed.

"Maybe not. I took a look at it a while ago; heavy at the bottom — an emory bag: women sharpen needles with it, and keep it hanging near a 'sewing chair'— make it do, too, for a wall ornament."

Ross, ignoring this windy interest in an emory bag, elaborated:

- "And the bloody paper-knife and the bloodstained portfolio, the artist's portfolio in the alcove where —"
- "Ain't there now," the old man said, giving the major a hawk-like look.
 - "How do you know?"
 - "Been looking around a little."

Ross flung back the alcove curtains and verified the disappearance of the portfolio.

- "Nobody but you and myself had keys to this apartment!"
 - "We thought so."
 - "Do you know where the portfolio is?"
 - " No, sir!"
- "By Ned!" exclaimed the major. "Some-body's been in—"

Ringing of the telephone stopped the deduction. He answered the call.

- "This is Mr. Conrad, Felix Conrad, trying to get in touch with Major Ross," the smooth, deliberate enunciation came on the wire.
 - "This is Major Ross."
- "Good morning, Major. I was told you were at the Melwood. I've important news for you—the Newman case. Shall I give it to you or to Hastings, the Department of Justice man?"
- "Why, both. We're here now. Can you come right over?"
 - "I thought --- well, yes."

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Ross announced Conrad's coming.

- "Able fellow, Conrad," he added. "I've seen a good deal of him lately. He's done good work waking us up to the spy menace."
- "Humph!" grunted Hastings, loyal to his branch of the government. "Never saw him, but I don't like him."
 - " Why?".
- "Nothing but a press agent for himself biggest self-booster ever lived, except Julius Cesar. Always crossing Rubicons after they've run dry. But say! how's Miss Newman this morning?"
 - "No change still unconscious."
 - "Why? Why unconscious?"
- "Loss of blood. Riley says she almost bled to death."

Ross, supposed to co-operate with the federal agent in handling a crime punishable under federal law, had made up his mind to co-operate as little as possible. He would do all the work and get all the credit.

"While we wait," he shifted the conversation, "suppose you give me the facts your bureau's got about this woman. I understand she's been watched for some time."

Mr. Hastings ran a forefinger over the cutting he had just done, balanced the wood in his left hand and, closing one eye, squinted carefully at his achievement.

"That?" he said, sculpture suspended, his words slow. "Not much to it. Miss Zimony Newman, twenty-six, five feet nine and a half inches, brunette, handsome, reserved, always wears black or yellow. Born Budapest. Brought to Chicago by parents, named Bruck, twenty-five years ago. Mother opera singer, married Bruck against her family's wishes. They went under name of Newman. Mother died when this girl was five. Father soon followed; left enough for her education. She's always associated with decent people."

He whittled again, making small, thin chips, symbols of the lack of significance in his narrative.

"Not much there," the major criticized. "Anything else?"

"She preferred the society of Austrians and Germans; knew some big ones. Left Chicago last December for New York, no apparent reason; from there to Norfolk last February, secretary to inventor named Knowles; came here last May. Lived very quietly here.—That's the whole kettle."

Major Ross evinced interest. Temporarily he addressed "the old hick" as a mental equal.

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"Knowles! That's a real clue! I got a wire a minute before I left the office. Here!"

He extended a telegram. Mr. Hastings, transferring his knife to the hand holding the wood, took the message, peered down the line of his nose under the edges of his spectacles, and read:

"Richmond, Va., August 16, 1918.— I am the unidentified man mentioned in this morning's newspapers as having called on Miss Newman, Melwood apartments, last night. I left her alive and well at nine-thirty-five. I am taking next train for Washington. Arrive two P. M.— (signed.) Robert F. Knowles."

He returned the telegram, observing:

"Robert F. Knowles, inventor; designer of the so-called torpedo-proof vessels."

He went back to the whittling — small chips. "Know anything more about him?" queried Ross.

"Had some trouble about his ship plans. Set of blue-prints disappeared lately."

The doorbell rang. Ross, dynamic once more, sprang up, every move electric, and went to the door.

He admitted Felix Conrad and David Gower. Hastings, rising slowly to acknowledge the introductions, retained his knee-hold on the basket. His first glance at the two men registered them in his brain for all time. No matter how long he would be thrown with them or how intimately he would know them, that first judgment would remain unchanged. He had had that gift all his life, and relied on it.

He checked the new arrivals:

"Hard-boiled brother: selfish, a crook if necessary. Pale guy: a dope-fiend, no insides to him."

He resumed the whittling — long, slender shavings.

"My secretary, Mr. Gower," Conrad began, "has important information. As soon as he told me about it, I suggested the necessity of his giving it to the auth — to you, Major."

Hastings made a mental note:

"Rehearsed stuff!"

Felix was in good form. The lack of control Rosalie had seen was gone. He regarded Ross—and, like Ross, ignored Hastings—with amiability. He had now a nicely adjusted smile that began with his upper lip and went no higher than his nostrils. An urbane, elegant man of the world, he consented to inconvenience himself in behalf of law and order. His manner declared that fact.

His announcement made, he threw Gower a quick look. It reminded the old "hick" in the morris chair of a ring-master he had seen in a circus.

"We need all the help we can get," said the major. "Won't you have a seat, and you, Mr. Gower?"

Conrad sat down, producing a cigarette case and matches. His bearing was a polite and unprotesting boredom, a delicate intimation of weariness. Hobnobbing with policemen, listening to the tiresome details of a sordid crime—that, it seemed, was vastly different from his serious work, the awakening of a country's consciousness to the menace of the spy evil. Here he condescended, and, recognizing the condescension as a duty, did it gracefully.

"Thanks; I think I'll stand," Gower declined the invitation. "I can talk better."

He took one of Conrad's cigarettes and inhaled big clouds of the smoke. His hands trembled.

"Needs a 'shot,'" thought Hastings, apparently oblivious of everything but his carving.

"I'm a little shaken up," Gower said. Like his employer, he addressed himself exclusively to Ross.

His statement was superfluous. Immaculately dressed in dark-blue serge, black low-quarter shoes and light-grey socks, he still needed more "snap" than his tailor had been able to hang upon him. He was thin to the point of emaciation.

His clothing did not nullify the weird suggestion that solid flesh had fallen from his bones inside the flabby envelope of his skin. The contrast of black moustache with the unbroken pasty-white of his face marked him even more plainly as "done for."

"I saw the business of last night, the stabbing, all of it."

He said that jerkily, with effort, and stood staring at Ross, hands thrust into his trousers pockets. He had a habit of twitching his shoulders, moving the upper half of his torso, like a man who feels that his coat is too big for him.

"Saw it!"

The exclamation from Ross combined incredulity with irritation. He could not understand the fellow's staring silence. With a glance, he interrogated Conrad.

Felix, languid and comfortable, left off tapping the cigarette case with his fingernails. He had the air of congratulating himself on his own astounding patience. And now, about to assume the uncongenial role of prompter in a repugnant performance, he permitted himself the luxury of a sigh, the very thistledown of mild regret.

Thus self-indulged, he came to the major's relief.

"Suppose, David, you show us exactly how it happened, in detail."

"Yes; saw it; from my bedroom window across the street, yes;" the secretary responded to the

suggestion, his voice shrill on the last word. "Come here; you'll see."

He went into the bedroom, followed by Ross and Conrad.

"Wouldn't Mr.—er —" Felix began, to Ross.

"Hastings," the federal agent refreshed the exquisite's memory. "No, thanks. Stay here. I can get everything he says."

He was more intent than ever on his carving.

"My window," Gower, breathing heavily, told Ross, "the window of my bedroom is there on the third floor, the third window counting back from I Street. See? It's not quite as high as this window, by between two and three feet. But you see the straight, uninterrupted line of vision from there to this window, through the opening in the foliage of the trees?"

"Sure!" Ross jogged him to quick speech. "Go on."

"My window was open last night. So was this one.— Another cigarette, Mr. Conrad?"

The twitching of his fingers was pronounced enough to make him drop the match. Conrad held one for him.

"I had just come in last night and happened to glance in this direction, and —"

"Excuse me, Mr. Gower!" Hastings' drawl had in it a quality which made the apology an imperative.

While they watched him, he set the basket to one side and leisurely transferred the knife to his left hand. Then, grunting audibly, he rose to his feet.

"Got to telephone," he enlightened them. "What's the number of your residence?" he inquired, for the first time giving Felix a lingering, appraising look.

Conrad, exhibiting no surprise, not even curiosity, told him.

While they waited, the major impatiently snapping his fingers and looking at his wrist watch every few seconds, Hastings got Whipple on the wire and had his talk with Thayer. He returned to the morris chair.

Conrad, lifting his brows a thirty-second of an inch, looked at Ross and smiled slightly.

"What you laughing at, Mr. Conrad?" Hastings made the query slow, indifferent.

"Laughing?" Felix retorted, blandly incredulous. "I wasn't aware of it, certainly not aware of mirth."

"I thought you were," the detective explained, peering under his spectacles at the knife blade. Then, testing the edge with prudent forefinger, he asked: "Why the silence? Let's have the story."

"Thayer anything to do with it?" Ross inquired, petulant.

"Thayer?"

"Yes; Thayer! You asked him to come here."

"No. I had to see him. That's all."

"All right, Mr. Gower!" Ross demanded.
"You looked over here?"

"Yes, Major. I think I said the shade of this window was not down? Yes. Just as I glanced over here, I saw Miss Newman standing a little back from the window, here —"he took his stand within a yard of the side of the bed —"near the bed. In fact, I saw her flash into sight from the direction of the reception room. She had the air of great haste, running. That was what held my interest."

He stopped, trying to moisten his lips with his dry tongue.

"Any water?" he requested the major. "My mouth's dry as a chip."

Ross brought him water.

"Right here, where I'm standing, she turned and threw up her hands, this way, above her head, a gesture of defiance, or anger. It didn't look like fear. Then, she lowered them, held them out straight in front of her, as if to resist a pursuer.

"As she did so, the pursuer — all this happened in the twinkling of an eye, you understand — he ran into her; he threw himself against her; he had his hand up, the knife, or the blade, whatever it was, shining. And, as he ran against her, he struck; he brought down his hand with all his strength: he stabbed her."

Gower's voice snapped on the last three words, went into tenor. He stopped, his eyes with unnaturally small pupils glittering, the pastywhite of his face uncoloured by the agitation that shook him.

Ross, his whole attitude urging him to continue, stared at him. Hastings, knife still for the fraction of a second, looked through the doorway at Conrad and found that gentleman's mask of urbanity unimpaired. Felix was blowing little spirals of smoke toward the ceiling, and rocking gently to and fro on the balls of his feet.

"Who was it? Who was the man?" The tension had been too much for Ross. He caught Gower by the arm. "Who was the man?"

"He was a tall man, a large man, dressed in light clothes, white," Gower said, shaking off the major's hand.

"But who? His name, man!"

Gower, feet spread wide apart, hands clasped behind him and writhing one against the other, smiled vacantly. He was not thinking of the scene he had described. He was fighting for control of the physical nervousness that had hold of him.

Ross repeated the question.

Gower, intent upon his own suffering, deliberately walked into the reception room. Ross followed, Felix strolling after, still patient, still blowing spirals to the ceiling.

- "What's the matter?" urged the astonished Ross. "Mr. Conrad, what's the trouble? Why doesn't your—"
- "No trouble, really," Gower, leaning his shoulders against the low mantel, faced him. "Nervousness. You'd be nervous if you'd seen it!"
 - "Probably," Ross agreed, "but his name!"
 "I can't say what it was.— A cigarette, Mr.
- "I can't say what it was.— A cigarette, Mr. Conrad?"

Conrad gave it to him and struck the match, advising gently, as one might coax a child:

"Oh, tell him the trouble, Gower. You'll have to, sooner or later, anyway."

Ross, bewildered by this, appealed to Conrad:

- "What is the trouble?"
- "Dope!" Hastings made that announcement.

He had put away his sculpture, restored wood and knife to his pockets.

"That's it," Gower agreed, apparently relieved by not having to explain.

In fact, the call of his tortured nerves for the drug was so insistent that his apologetic smile was slight. Shame of the weakness was minimized by his craving for relief. He said as much.

"I need some of it now, this minute."

The doorbell rang, startling him visibly; his nerves were jumping.

This time Hastings went to the door, admitting John Thayer.

"This Mr. Hastings?"

The inquiry floated back, pleasantly toned, to those in the reception room.

"Yes, Senator Thayer. Come right in."

The senator, preceding Hastings and striding quickly down the short passage, appeared with dramatic suddenness in the doorway opening into the reception room. Clad in white, his great physique stood out sharply defined against the dimness behind him. His authoritative bearing, his bigness emphasized by an easy grace of attitude, impressed vividly the three men he faced.

But it was upon Gower that his appearance had a sensational effect. The man's eyes widened as they fixed on Thayer. His jaw dropped. When he closed his mouth, he accomplished it so spasmodically that his teeth went together with a click.

He put out both hands, the movement a repetition of the gesture he had used in illustrating Miss Newman's defiance of her assailant.

"There's the man," he said in a voice neither hoarse nor deep bass, but a mixture of both, far back in his throat. "God! He stabbed her."

His hands fell to his sides; he sagged in at the waist. His eyes closed slowly, the eyelids twitching. Then, very slowly, with the care and deliberation essential for the performance of a difficult physical feat, he sank into the chair behind him. It was not so much that he, of his own volition, did this. The idea conveyed was that of a helpless, senile person being placed in an easy chair by two strong men, one on each side of him.

His horror—a sincere emotion back of his words—left no question of his earnestness. It was this that gave to the accusation its effect.

Stupefaction held them all.

Thayer, uninformed of what had occurred before his arrival, was the first to assert himself.

"What foolery is this?" he demanded angrily, glancing from Gower to Conrad.

Felix, suave and reassuring, discounting by tone and word the importance of the incident, sketched in a few sentences the story Gower had told.

"As for this," he indicated his secretary, "it's nothing — a seizure, such as he has sometimes. They last only a minute or two."

Thayer was not placated.

He came further into the room, to confront Gower.

"What are you talk --"

Gower, a crumpled figure, shuddered and sat upright, fingers feeling clumsily for the arms of the chair. He turned his head to the right, chin resting on his collarbone.

"Conrad — Conrad and myself," he said with a sigh, an unaffected sorrow in the words.

To that Felix replied, his voice free from indignation but sharp enough to forbid a silly man's wild talking.

"Speak for yourself, David! You're alone in this."

Jefferson Hastings, his chin elevated, had been peering under his spectacles at Gower. He was thoroughly absorbed, apparently, in the examination. This idea, however, was misleading. He had also been watching Conrad, and had caught, when Gower spoke, the signs of a crack in the Conrad mask.

They had been slight, so trivial, so briefly existent and so nicely retrieved, that many men might have doubted their own vision. Not so with Mr. Hastings. He saw what he saw. And he knew the secretary's words had displeased the employer.

"Unrehearsed stuff, that!" he thought. What are these two hiding? What's one hid-

ing from the other? Where's the end of their cooperation — and the start of their distrust of one another?"

Gower, roused by Conrad's voice, opened his eyes, shut and closed them quickly several times, and turned to face Ross.

"I'm afraid," he began, forcing a deprecatory laugh, "I startled you. For an instant just then, I wasn't myself. I beg—"

He was again aware of the figure in white towering over him.

"For God's sake, Thayer!" he protested.
"You stabbed her!"

At this, the tension which had begun to relax caught them anew, all except the senator.

- "See here!" he demanded sternly. "Listen to me, Gower! Are you yourself now?"
 - "Yes," Gower answered, looking up to him.
- "Responsible for what you say? Know what you say?"

Hastings stepped forward and put a hand on Thayer's arm.

- "Yes."
- "And you accuse me of the attack upon Miss Newman?"
 - "Why, yes; I do."

The reply was direct, devoid of any particular feeling. The man pronounced it as if giving utterance to one of the simplest facts imaginable.

Thayer, sure that Gower was himself guilty, certain that the whole scene was a carefully prepared trap, narrowly escaped the folly of handling him roughly.

He overcame the impulse, and raised his left arm, intending a careless, sweeping gesture to show the futility of arguing the question under such conditions.

Gower cut it short.

"You see!" This time he shouted. "His left hand! He held the knife in his left hand."

Thayer, convinced now of the menace of the scene, denounced him:

"Why, the whole thing's a lie! Wild talk of a dope-fiend! You gentlemen, what does it mean, this entire lay-out?"

He looked them all, one at a time, in the eye, his gaze concluding with Hastings.

"Major Ross," the old man answered by questioning the chief of police, "what do you propose?"

"Mr. Gower," Ross queried, struggling for his best police manner, "do you mean this accusation to stand, that you saw Senator Thayer stab Miss Newman?"

" I do."

"Then, Senator," Ross declared, "I've no alternative."

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"No alternative!" Thayer repeated, unbelieving.

"None whatever, Senator. It's the accusation of an eye-witness. You understand my position.

— You're under arrest."

V

CONSPIRING FOR THE DEFENCE

"ATURALLY," Thayer accepted the major's decision; "it's your duty — if you take this man seriously."

He had to struggle with his impulse to strike, to administer bodily punishment. He experienced an actual craving for the relief of brutal action. Something like that, he felt, would break the tension of his nerves.

He thought, too, of Rosalie — not how the arrest might affect her, but a warm sympathy for her because of the stifling, repressive influence she had been obliged to fight in her association with her father, this exact machine whose life was ordered on the principle that coldness was the only stepping stone to happiness.

Ross was explaining that Gower must be taken seriously, that the accusation was unqualified.

"I see," Thayer retorted. "Very well.—I don't suppose there'll be any trouble arranging bail."

"Everything possible will be done, Senator," Ross hastened to say. "The only thing to pre-

vent would be Miss Newman's death, or the certainty of her death."

"Yes." He looked at his watch. "I'd like to telephone Senator Brandon. He—"

Hastings presented a suggestion.

"Major, we're dealing with a senator; big game; no 'gun man' or porch-climber. A delay of a few —"

"This is Washington!" snapped the major.

"Senators are not as big here as they are down in Kentucky. If I don't arrest him, you know what the papers will say?"

"You're right, Major," Thayer intervened. "An eye-witness charges me with the crime. I can't disprove the accusation this morning, per haps not tomorrow morning."

"Thanks, Senator." Ross was immediately mollified. "I'm glad to see it that way."

"Just a moment more, Senator — and you, too, Major."

The request from Hastings this time came with unexpected force. Baggy, disheveled, his old felt hat at a crazy angle on the back of his head, he struck them now as vastly more entitled to consideration than any of them had thought. For this impression on their part, no special reason was visible or audible.

He stood before them as he had been standing, his hands buried in his coat pockets, his shoulders stooped, his head flung back, his glance creeping under his spectacles and down the line of his nose toward Gower. Nothing about him had changed; nevertheless, they recognized, without question, his title to command.

Gower, a little calmer since his attack, still occupied the chair into which he had fallen. He moved his lips continuously, occasionally catching the lower between his teeth; and he crossed and uncrossed his knees, calling attention to the extraordinary thinness of his legs.

"Mr. Gower, what time was it when you saw the stabbing of Miss Newman?" the old man opened his inquiry.

"Twenty minutes to ten," Gower answered without hesitation.

"How do you know that? Did you look at your watch?"

"Not then. I fell down — had a fall as soon as I had seen the attack. The fall broke the crystal of my watch and stopped the hands, stopped them at nine-forty."

"When did you find that out?"

"This morning."

Hastings stopped the rapid-fire questions and peered at Gower for what seemed an eternity to his listeners.

"Mr. Gower," he resumed, "isn't it possible that the hands of your watch might have kept

going for some time after the — er — fall, and been stopped finally by a fragment of glass being jammed under one of the hands?"

- "Why, no well, probably -"
- "If you'll excuse me: the mainspring was bro—" Conrad, bored, a martyr to the cause of justice, began.
 - "I asked Mr. Gower that question, Mr. Conrad," the detective interrupted drily. "He'll have to rely on his own mentality when he's on the stand. Better let him have the benefit of this practice."
 - "Of course. Certainly, if you prefer —" Felix, the image of indifference, smilingly agreed.
 - "Yes," Hastings left him in no doubt. "I do prefer.— Now, Mr. Gower, was the mainspring broken?"
 - "It was."
 - "Humph!" Hastings grunted. "Bad!—Bad! It may interest you to recall that at nine-forty last night, according to the elevator boy's story, there was no visitor in this apartment. Miss Newman's first caller, a man named Knowles, left the Melwood at nine-thirty-five. Senator Thayer came in at nine-forty-five."
 - He stepped forward, silent again, and stood within two feet of Gower, as if he meditated.
 - "Let's have the watch!" The unexpected demand came curt and crisp.

Gower, releasing the chain from the buttonhole in his coat lapel, handed him a gold watch, open-faced.

Hastings passed it to Ross.

"Keep that, Major; will you? If that mainspring was broken, let us say *curiously*, with an instrument, by means of pressure from a knifeblade, it can be seen by any watch-maker."

The implication of trickery left Gower and Conrad unmoved.

Thayer, seeing no special point, certainly no point of benefit to him, in the old man's work, tried to end it.

"Mr. Hastings, if Major Ross is ready, I'm afraid I —"

"Just a moment longer, Senator," Hastings requested, with a glance over the rims of his glasses. "Mr. Gower," the examination continued, "why did you wait twelve hours to give the authorities this information?"

Gower's nervousness was upon him again. Hastings saw that physical discomfort had precedence over everything in the man's thoughts.

"Morphine," the sufferer said, his fingers uselessly busy with the arms of the chair. "I was full of it last night."

"You mean morphine put you to sleep after you'd seen this assault?"

"Understand me. It often subjects me to—well, dreams, I suppose you'd call it. At first, I thought what I had seen might have been merely imagination. I found out differently this morning. But I went to sleep last night after I'd—"he put his dry tongue to dry lips "— after I'd had that fall."

Conrad, lounging at the window, dropped into the pool of temporary silence a few words musical with the sweetness of his mood. Resentment, his manner still attested, had no place in his heart.

"Interesting as this is," he said, flipping a spent match toward the gas-logs. "I regret, sincerely, that I have other affairs to—"

"So have I!" chimed Hastings, making the exclamation surprisingly vigorous and clearing his throat with tremendous noise.

"So have I!" he repeated. "Major, as I understand it, the senator's under arrest?"

" Yes."

"I take it this will answer: I assume charge of the senator, charge and responsibility for his appearance at headquarters — let's see;" he looked at his watch. "It's eighteen minutes past ten — at police headquarters at or before eleventhirty. My chief wanted to ask him a few questions, at the department. That answer?"

It was a request that could hardly be refused,

even in the absence of an invitation that the chief of police accompany them.

"Fine!" the old man thanked the major. "That's really accommodating.—Senator, will you come with me? You can do your 'phoning from the department.—Gentlemen, good morning!"

Without the semblance of haste, he managed the getaway in a few seconds, leaving the major ruminating on what he should say to the newspapers.

Pushing the elevator button, Hastings thrust his chin against his chest, looked over the steel rims of his spectacles, and smilingly regarded his prisoner?"

- "Get me?" he inquired, eyes beaming.
- "I get this much," Thayer said roughly, not yielding fully to his instinctive liking of the old man; "you realize the folly of my arrest!"
- "My name's Hastings, Jeff Hastings," he informed, reverting to slow speech and short sentences. "Bureau of Investigation. Friend of Senator Brandon. Brandon 'phoned me; told me to look out for you. That's my job.—What comes first?"
 - "What first?"
- "Yes. Being arrested is being arrested. Thought you might use an hour extra stolen hour."

"But what about the Department of Justice, your chief?"

The old man peered down the elevator shaft.

"Strategic retreat, Senator. Chief would like to see you, but — well, later. Brandon asked me to give you all I could. Here's the hour, all yours.—What now?"

Hastings's matter-of-factness, his evident desire to help, had its effect on the younger man. Thayer regained his balance. He began to think coherently.

They stepped into the elevator before he could answer his ally's question.

"To the basement," Hastings directed the operator, and added to Thayer: "Get away from the reporters out front. We'll take the back way, down the alley."

Thayer stopped him before they left the basement.

"I can't thank you, Mr. Hastings, for —" he began.

"No; you can't," the old man broke in, his eyes twinkling. "Nothing to thank for. Now what?"

"But I can devote all my time to this thing," the senator continued. "I'm going to work on it myself. I'll tell the Senate so, today, from the floor. And I can bring you any facts I dig up, if it will help you."

"That's the talk, son — I mean 'Senator.' I'm with you - the whole crow, feathers, beak and claw. Ross and I supposedly are working together, but, so far, I know mighty near all he and I together know about this case. And he's having a lot of fun laughing at me! - What now?"

- "I want to examine David Gower's bedroom."
- "Right there you scratched the itch in my brain, son! You think —"
- "If he isn't, he knows somebody who is," Thayer answered quickly, anxious to start.

"Where do you get that?"

The detective refused to hurry before being answered.

- "Larry my brother told me about this man's attentions to Miss Newman immediately after her arrival in Washington. I should say. perhaps, his attempted attentions."
 - "What happened?"
- "She got rid of him, of course. You know his kind. It left him vindictive - threatening, I believe."
 - "What? Threatening what?"

The old man still hung back.

- "Nothing special. You know the stuff those fellows throw into women's faces -wild talk."
- "Yes .- Let's go down this alley," Hastings moved at last; "and around the other block -

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we'll get into the Conrad house, run into nobody on the way."

Thayer, driven by suspense, covered the distance in long, quick strides; the old man, his clothing bagging and flapping tremendously, kept pace with him. The senator's thoughts were busy with his belief that Gower, if not actually guilty of the crime, had been its moving agent and that Conrad would go to any lengths to save him. It was an idea he could not shake off.

They waited in the "small drawing-room" for Rosalie. She came in, smiling, a little breathless. One glance at Thayer showed her that already he faced difficulty.

"Things have begun to happen, Rosalie. Gower's accused me of the attack."

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" she breathed.

"Time is everything just now," he hurried.

"Mr. Hastings — here, please." The old man, turning from a window across the room, joined them. "Miss Conrad, let me present Mr. Hastings.— He and I want to have a look at Gower's room. May we?"

"Of course, John! Anything you wish." The two men started toward the door.

"May I come?"

Thayer looked at Hastings.

"I've the authority, Miss Conrad," the old man answered her, flashing the badge under his coat lapel. "But you — would it be disagreeable if he came back and interrupted us?"

"As if I cared!" she spoke her scorn.

In the very moment of defying conventionality, she recalled a contemptuous pronouncement of her father: "A woman in love blinds herself to any crime the man may commit, except the crime of infidelity to herself; and justifies any offence of her own, so long as it is done in his defence."

The memory had no effect upon her. She realized that, under the stress of the situation, her rational self ceased to function. Her feeling self was the governor she welcomed.

"Then," Hastings warned, "we'll begin; no time to lose."

VI

THE HOLE IN THE SCREEN

HAYER'S certainty of incriminating Gower was absolute. As soon as they were in the room, he selected the desk as the first point of attack. It was soon evident that Gower did not let letters accumulate. Thayer, undiscouraged, pulled open pigeon-holes, dragged out drawers, worked feverishly.

"John, ought you? Is it right?" Rosalie asked, from the doorway.

"Anything's right, dealing with a thing like him."

Hastings was at the window, bending, stooping, his face toward the Melwood. Once he got down on his hands and knees. From that, he stepped back to a rocking chair and sat in it. The remainder of the room had no interest for him.

Thayer looked up, the desk thoroughly ransacked, his hands empty.

"What I expected," commented Hastings. "Too sharp to leave anything."

Thayer, unconvinced, continued the hunt. On the top shelf in the closet he found a revolver, all the chambers loaded. Hastings saw that it was a duplicate of the one found in Miss Newman's apartment.

He examined it minutely. Screwing a jeweler's magnifying glass over his left eye, he gave it a second examination.

"Perfectly clean," he told them. "Nine out of ten men would say it hadn't been discharged lately, but—" He held it to his nose and sniffed, first the end of the barrel, then the chambers. "Look in the bathroom, Senator. Any ammonia, aromatic, there?—Good!" He uncorked the bottle and held it to his nose, breathing deeply, drawing the fumes through his nostrils until tears stood in his eyes. "Makes your smelling apparatus more sensitive," he explained, going back to the revolver, sniffing at it many times.

"Discharged lately," he gave his opinion.

"Hard to kill that smokeless powder odour—acrid; dies hard." He turned to the senator:

"I'd put it back on the shelf."

"If it's been discharged recently?"

"Yes. You and I are on a stabbing case."

They went into the hall, with nothing to discredit Gower, nothing to discredit anybody.

"How about this next room — here, the front room?" asked Hastings.

"Vacant," Rosalie said.

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He turned the knob and stepped in. It was vacant, literally, with the exception of a heavy, dark-green carpet which covered every inch of the floor. The two windows on the Eighteenth Street side and the one on I Street were fitted with wire screens. The lower glass sash of each was raised, and the outside wooden blinds were closed.

Rosalie and Thayer saw no possibilities there. They stood near the mantel talking while Hastings raised the screen and opened the wooden shutters of the I Street window. He turned and surveyed the room again. He scrutinized the floor, the walls, the ceiling. The carpet finally took his attention.

He produced the magnifying glass and adjusted it to his eye. On hands and knees he began a swift hunt, remarkably thorough for the brief time he gave it. Crawling around, lowering his head until it was within a few inches of the floor, his baggy clothes hanging down and brushing the carpet, he looked like a clumsy animal hunting aimlessly and half-hopelessly for buried food.

From that, he turned to the two Eighteenth Street windows. One of them, he found by looking through a crack in the wooden shutter, commanded a good view of Miss Newman's reception room, as good, in fact, as the view of her bedroom from Gower's window. The breaks in the foliage outside were so formed that Gower's window afforded no sight of the Newman reception room and the window at which he was now standing gave no view of the Newman bedroom. His examination of this window was minute.

Thayer told Rosalie what had occurred in the Melwood.

"But father," she said, "he couldn't have believed such a story — surely! — Didn't he say anything?"

"There was nothing for him to say — particularly. He had his secretary's interests to look after."

She understood then: her father had failed her lover. Humiliation, hot and sickening, rushed upon her.

"Perhaps," she heard herself saying, from a great distance, "he saw the folly of taking it seriously."

"Yes," he corroborated; "elaborate denial would only have given it a false dignity."

He perceived that her eyes were now bluishgreen, like beryls, and hard as beryl.

Hastings claimed their attention. He was moving his hand along the mantel, a few feet from them, with the motion one uses for scraping up small particles of material, jealous of losing any speck of it.

He lifted his hand, disclosing a little mass of white sand. Having scraped it to within an inch of the mantel edge, he took from one of his pockets—"the magic saddle-bags," Rosalie named them later—an envelope, into which he pushed with one careful finger the last grain of the sand. In all, there was, perhaps, a heaping teaspoonful of it.

"Glad you were here to see this," he said, folding the envelope into small, intricate angles, to be sure of its spilling nothing.

Thayer noticed that he wore now the air of authority he had made so evident in his examination of Gower. The senator was to see, or sense, many times that transformation in him, the sudden putting on of power

"Now, Miss Conrad," he resumed, "one thing more, if I may?—The store room, where old furniture, old anything, is kept. Such a room in the house?"

"Yes; in the basement."

They followed him downstairs. In the basement Rosalie, producing keys, led the way and unlocked the door. But it was he who found the electric switch and turned on the light, two low-power bulbs which filled the large, low-ceiled room with shadows. He used his electric torch.

Here, more than upstairs, he hurried, an odd figure assuming grotesque shapes and accom-

plishing athletic feats. Exploring the jumble of cast-off articles, he stepped over chairs, lay on his stomach, slid across tables and rolled his way over three barrels. He penetrated everywhere, sent dust in every direction, missed nothing.

When he stopped, he had under his right arm a sheet of steel about three feet long and two and one-half wide, and under his left arm a shallow box of sand of the same measurements as the steel. His right hand dragged along the floor a piece of wire-screen the size of the lower half of the third-floor windows.

His face and hands were grimy; his clothes, waving and flapping to his least movement, threw off puffs of dust that formed an aura around him.

They would have laughed but for his solemnity and that feeling of his mental strength. He touched them with the intensity of his thought.

"Look, both of you, will you? — This sheet of steel, thickness an eighth of an inch, heavy, nearly forty pounds." He let it fall on edge, keeping it upright. Its weight bit into the floor. "And this box of sand. Here, son; hold this torch."

He took from his pocket the treasured envelope of sand he had scraped from the upstairs mantel. This sand he compared with that in the shallow box. They were identical. "And this wire screening. There's a hole in it, right there, about the centre. This side was the outside, turned toward the weather. Was the hole made from the outside or from the room inside?"

"From the outside," Rosalie answered first. Thayer thought so, too.

"Correct," the detective said, pleased. "Funny kind of a hole, too. Couldn't have been done by woodpeckers, for instance.—Watch me, please."

He placed his three finds, one by one, at the bottom of a hogshead, each time bending over and thrusting so much of himself into the well of darkness that he seemed to escape, only by a miracle, losing his balance and falling completely out of sight.

"I put these three boards over the hogshead — see?" He scraped dust off a table. "With this dust on them, nobody can get at the contents of the hogshead without leaving evidence of the visit."

He stood up and peered under his spectacles at the hogshead.

"I may want those things later, Miss Conrad—but give 'em to nobody but me. If you're handed a note from me asking you to deliver them to somebody, don't do it. The note from me won't be from me."

When they reached the first floor, the Jefferson Hastings who had been working with them was once more a stranger, merely an old "hick," almost fatuous in his beaming kindliness, moving lazily in his ill-fitting clothes. Steely keenness of eye no longer distinguished him. Conservation of energy was no riddle to him.

Whipple showed him to a bathroom.

"Cripes!" he said, surveying with twinkling eye the expanse of shining porcelain. "Fine enough for a pet racehorse!"

Looking over the bundled towel with which he rubbed his face, he spoke suddenly, to win Whipple's good-will.

- "You've an unusually active brain, I can see. You read the papers, don't you, with appreciation and thoughtfulness?"
 - "I hope I can say that, sir."
- "Exactly. Consequently, you've been among the first to realize that large and interesting events are taking place in this—neighbourhood?"
 - "I should rather say, sir!"

From that moment, the butler was one of the detective's most ardent admirers.

Hastings made his point:

"And, if Miss Conrad authorized me to question you at any time about anything, past or future, you'd be agreeable?"

- "I shouldn't hesitate, sir not a moment, sir."
- "I knew it! Here, Whipple! Don't brush that hat; it might tear."

Rosalie and Thayer were waiting for him in the small drawingroom.

The senator, captive, like Whipple, to the old man's elusive, indefinable charm, put a hand affectionately on his shoulder.

- "You find us in terrific dispute," he announced with mock terror. "Miss Conrad complains that I undervalue her as a feminine Sherlock and refuse her co-operation!"
- "It's so hard, really, Mr. Hastings," Rosalie said, harmonizing her tone with Thayer's; "hard to wait, with nothing to do!"
 - "I proceed to —" began Thayer.
- "Our time's up in ten minutes," Hastings warned.

He knew that Thayer's present buoyancy was the compensating reaction from the suspense and shock of the night and morning. It was natural enough; but there was ahead of him a full day's work. The emotional pendulum must not swing too far in any direction.

"The car's waiting for us," the senator refused to be diverted. "Now, Miss Conrad, you want work. Here it is: let's keep our luncheon engagement with Mrs. Beale Jackson."

"Today!"

"Today, yes — and at the Wareham," he laughed the challenge.

Rosalie shuddered, dismayed by a prophetic glimpse of the Wareham diningroom — the whispered asides, the curious eyes.

"The Wareham, of all places!" Her exclamation now was a play for time — to see how much in earnest he was.

"At a quarter to two," he persisted, eagerness sounding clear under the surface levity of his urging. "Besides, Mrs. Jackson expects us."

She put off all hesitance at once.

"Miss Sherlock," she said, laughter in her eyes, on her lips, "accepts — and is delighted."

"Nothing could mean more to me," he said, the levity gone. "I'm no longer, to many people, the person I was yesterday. And nothing could prove my innocence half as conclusively as my appearance with you — you, of all people! — at the Wareham."

The idea, the recklessness of it, appealed to her sense of the dramatic as it had to his.

"I'll bring you down from the Senate in my runabout, after your speech," she said.

The two men were at the front door.

Hastings went back to her and bent over her hand. His bow, in spite of his flapping garments, reminded her of treasured, bygone things:

a rose pressed between the pages of a book for sentiment's sake, exquisite old lace hidden in sandalwood chests—

"So brave," he said; "so like a daughter I might — You will forgive an old man, Miss Conrad; but to be brave: it is the foundation of all the other lovely things. The world was made for the brave — like you."

She gave a little cry and turned her face from him, not trusting her voice for answer.

"The time may come," he added quick words, "when you will need my help. It's always at your call. When a father's interests, beliefs, clash with a — another's — a fiancé's, it is often so — often."

Left alone, she thought: "He likes John—and he knows father doesn't."

On the way to police headquarters Thayer complained to the detective:

"A sheet of steel, Mr. Hastings—a sheet of steel, a wire screen and a box of sand: that's a weird mixture.— Do they lead anywhere?"

"Ahem!" Hastings cleared his throat noisily.
"Clues? I'll tell you what's a fact, Senator: they may not be worth a d.mn!—That's the trouble about clues.— Hello! here we are at head-quarters. And there's Brandon!"

VII

MR. HASTINGS STUDIES "SOCIETY"

ENATOR THAYER, pacing the floor, and Hastings, whittling a piece of pine, were in the office of the chief of police. They awaited the arrival of Robert F. Knowles, designer of ships immune from torpedo attack. Ross, having called the meeting for three o'clock, was already ten minutes late.

"These book policemen!" growled the government's detective. "Always late; their boots never can keep up with their brains."

"I can't wait much longer," protested Thayer.

"I want to catch that elevator boy, at his rooming house. He knows more than he's told so far."

- "About what who?"
- "Gower."
- "I hope. Might be a good thing to put this Gower behind the bars, get him away from his dope."
 - "Why away from his dope?"
- "Loosen his tongue make him fly all to pieces."

The senator was silent, troubled by a story in

an early afternoon newspaper, under the headline:

"BOTH THAYERS IN NEWMAN CASE!"

The story itself had set forth that Senator Thayer's brother had known yesterday that the senator was to have an important conference last night with "the German agent, Zimony Newman." The police had found in her apartment early this morning a note written to her by Dr. Larry Thayer.

It read:

"As he is to be there tonight, I of course shall stay away. Considering what the visit means for you as well as for myself, I am more than happy. So glad it could be arranged."

It was signed "Larry." To remove any possible doubt of genuineness, the paper printed a photograph of the note. It was in Larry's handwriting.

And Larry, asked about it over the telephone, had pleaded forgetfulness as his only reason for not having mentioned it!—"Forgetfulness" when he and Larry had discussed the tragedy from one in the morning until daylight!—Furthermore, Larry had told him, just now, that the published note was an answer to one from Zimony Newman explaining that she had made

an engagement with Knowles, primarily for the purpose of breaking off all relations with him.

For the first time, doubt assailed him—rather, a shadow of doubt. He refused to dwell on it, but he felt it—plainly.

The thing troubled him tremendously. Neither the triumph of his speech in the Senate, asserting his innocence of all knowledge of the crime, nor the cordial greetings given him at luncheon at the Wareham could dull the edge of this annoyance.

His reflection was halted by the entrance of a large, tall man, who wore dark-brown serge and carried in his right hand a broad-brimmed panama hat.

They introduced themselves.

"The major," Hastings said, "is a quarter of an hour late, and I've a lot to do, Mr. Knowles. Wonder if you'd answer a few questions—for me—and talk to the chief later."

He peered under the rims of his spectacles, sighting down the line of his nose at the inventor.

"With pleasure."

Knowles seated himself a few feet from the old man, facing him squarely. Thayer took a chair beside Hastings.

"Much obliged," said the detective, continuing his whittling. "Just go ahead, Mr.

Knowles, if you will; and tell us what happened last night—at the Melwood.—You don't mind Senator Thayer's being here, waiting for the chief?"

"Not in the slightest."

Knowles put his right ankle on his left knee and hung his hat on the sharp angle thus made of his right knee.

"The published accounts are practically correct," he began; "the story, that is, told by the coloured boy, Harry."

"Time correct? You went after the icecream at nine-twenty-six, and left the apartment the second time, the last time, at nine-thirty-four or nine-thirty-five?"

" Yes."

"All right, sir; why did you go to the Melwood?"

"I beg your pardon?" retorted Knowles, like a man seeking delay.

"You mean," the detective challenged, "you don't want to discuss that?"

He was thinking: "Same build as Thayer, same shoulders — wonder what he wore — and nervous, habitually nervous — flighty!"

"By no means!" the inventor denied. "I want to give you everything I've got. That's what I came back from Richmond for."

"Good! Go ahead."

MR. HASTINGS STUDIES "SOCIETY"

- "You asked me why I went to the Melwood. I'll tell you frankly. I thought Miss Newman had stolen a set of ship plans from my office in Norfolk. I had—"
- "Just a moment," Hastings interrupted. "What did you wear last night?"
 - "Wear last night!"
 - "Yes; what?"
 - "Well a suit of light-grey mohair."
- "All right. Don't mind my interrupting now and then. I suffer from absent-mindedness."

Knowles made his left knee the hatrack.

Hastings, digging into the wood with short, savage jabs, was thinking: "Light-grey mohair. Under electric light fifty yards away it would look as white as linen or white flannel — particularly, he would have looked white all over if he'd been in shirt-sleeves — as white as the senator."

Thayer put a question:

- "Had you made an appointment with Miss Newman?"
- "No; no appointment," Knowles replied, his candour perfect.

The senator asked nothing further. Larry had said Knowles had the appointment. It was Larry's word against that of Knowles.

Hastings, reading the senator's mind, came to the rescue:

"It's of no importance, the appointment idea.

You were saying, Mr. Knowles, you thought she had stolen — plans?"

"Yes."

The detective made another mental note: "He's a liar. He had an appointment. His eyes are too clear. Nobody's that honest."

"She was my private secretary," the inventor continued, "for two months. I fell—I presume we're talking confidentially; this won't be published?"

"No," Hastings declared, not looking up.

"Thanks. I want to do all I can to straighten this thing out. I fell in love with her while she was working for me."

He said that without embarrassment.

"She resigned the position, said she wouldn't work in the office of a man who had declared himself as I had. A few days ago, two weeks ago, to be exact, I discovered the loss of the plans. At first, I didn't suspect her. In fact, the idea of her guilt never entered my mind until the Department of Justice said all the other trails had led to nothing."

"When did the department tell you that?"

"Three days ago."

"And it was then that you suspected her?"

"At first, I didn't. Later, however, I had to agree that her opportunity to commit the theft

had been great. It was then I made up my mind to have a talk with her about it."

- "Your relations with her in the meantime, during the more than three months after her leaving your office: what were they?"
- "I was in love with perhaps, fascinated by her."
- "Ah!" the old man exclaimed, stabbing the wood as if to murder. "You're not in love with her now." He made that a flat statement.
 - "No; not after what occurred last night."

Hastings balanced the wood in his right hand and peered at it, shaking his head, not altogether satisfied with his sculpture.

- "What did occur?" he inquired.
- "Well, in a few words," Knowles said, "she ridiculed the idea of the theft, particularly when I demanded that she give the plans back to me."
- "You could hardly blame her for that, could you? She wouldn't have kept the plans three months would she?"
- "No. But the plans in question were blueprints, a foot and a half by three. It was my idea that, if she had taken them, she would have made small photographs of them, for purposes of easy transmission. Neither she nor a confederate would have run the risk of shipping such bulk as the originals."

- "But why should she have kept these originals three months? It would have subjected her to unnecessary danger."
- "You don't understand," Knowles qualified.
 "It isn't a certainty the theft was committed three months ago. It might have been just a little more than two weeks ago."
 - " How?"
- "She, Miss Newman, was in my office a little less than three weeks ago."
 - "In Norfolk?"
 - "Yes. She had come down by boat."
 - "Alone?"
- "Yes.—I can't say, don't know.—And she came to my office while I was at lunch. The office boy, remembering she had worked for me as my secretary, showed her into my private office—an unusual thing for him to do."

Hastings deliberated.

- "So the theft's more than three months old or less than three weeks old?"
 - "Yes."
- "Now, Mr. Knowles, how was it possible for you not to have discovered the theft until three months, or even two weeks, after its commission?"
- "The plans in question were a 'guide' set: not plans of any particular ship, but an illustration of the principles and methods used."

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- "Not in daily use in your office?"
- "No. I hadn't referred to them in the last four months. I didn't have to."
- "Good. I'm clear on that. Let's go back to last night. She —"
- "She ridiculed the theft idea at first, thinking I was joking. Then, she got mad, furiously angry. When she did—I told her—this is a hard thing to say, to admit, gentlemen. I hope it will be divulged no further."

Hastings reassured him once more.

- "Well, then, I told her it was a joke, merely an idea of mine to see whether she was as cold and statuesque as she always seemed — as free from anger as she was from softer emotions."
- "And that satisfied her, put her into good humour?"
 - "Yes; to all appearances."

Hastings chuckled.

- "Excuse me. What happened then?"
- "The thing you'd guess, of course. I made love to her said I wanted to marry her."

Hastings began to pack away his wood and knife.

- "And meant it?" he asked, brushing chips off his trousers, flapping the ends of his coat, for all the world like a clumsy old bird preparing for flight.
 - "At the time, yes." Knowles answered with

reluctance, his embarrassment at last beyond concealment. "Her charm, the physical appeal of her. I—there never was a woman — she was irresistible."

"Did she break off relations with you? End things?"

"Why, no. She didn't accept me; but—well, we were both in high good humour. You recall my going after the ice-cream for her?"

"Why, yes. So you did."

The old man stood up, dragged his hat from one of his coat pockets and put it on at a crazy angle. He looked at his watch, an old hunting-case affair, snapped the lid shut and turned again to Knowles.

"I believe we've covered everything, Mr. Knowles," he said affably, "and I'm obliged to you, greatly obliged.—Senator, it's nearly half after three. We'd better be moving.—The chief will want to see you, Mr.—"

Ross came in, garrulous with apologies.

"We'll leave you with Mr. Knowles," Hastings told him. "I'm late for an appointment now. So's the senator."

At the door Hastings wheeled about quickly.

"By the way, Mr. Knowles, why did you stop the phonograph when you returned with the ice-cream?"

"How's that?" countered Knowles. "I

don't remember - oh, I see. When I went into the reception room and found she wasn't there, I shut off the machine so as to hear what she was calling out to me, from the bedroom."

"An unimportant detail," the old man said carelessly. "The question popped into my head, and I popped it out again.- Your cigarette's burning your hat brim, Mr. Knowles!"

He followed Thayer out.

"I'm afraid of missing that boy," the senator said again as they halted on the marble steps of the building. "I've a machine here if --"

"You go ahead, Senator," Hastings declined the offer. "I've a machine of my own - looks like a million dollars! I'm going out amongst them this afternoon. I'm going to spend a few hours studying 'Society.'- Oh, I forgot something. It's this, son."

He put his hand on Thayer's arm; and his voice was a consolation.

"Knowles is a crook — liar. He still thinks the Newman girl got his plans, but he won't say so. Why not? Because he doesn't want anybody to think he had a motive for hating her or stabbing her."

"Is that why you cut short your talk with him?"

Thayer was deeply touched by the old man's affectionate concern — too deeply, he realized. He was fagged. He must keep himself in hand.
"Yes. What's the use of talking to a man you know is lying? That's Knowles — a slick actor.
If he didn't stab the girl, I'm crazy!"

Thayer delayed him:

"Larry's note. Did you know about it? Did Ross tell you about it?"

"No. I'm sorry to say he didn't."

"Ross isn't playing square with you," Thayer said indignantly. "Isn't there any professional etiquette among you men?"

Hastings smiled, belittling Ross' deception.

"Professional etiquette," he said, "is like the proverbial honour among thieves: it works when it works." He looked over his spectacles at Thayer and smiled again. "But there are more ways than one to skin a cat, son."

He climbed into his hired car and, with grunts and tuggings at his coat-tails, adjusted himself comfortably to a corner of the back seat. He gave the chauffeur Frederick Marcello's number.

He returned to his problem. The senator was in an unenviable position. That note of Larry Thayer's — very bad! Its wording was a calamity. Everybody read it as a statement that his brother, the senator, had consented to confer with the girl — had consented through fear, as the result of a threat!

Why hadn't Larry Thayer told his brother

about it? There was the weak spot in the whole case: Larry was a weakling, a member of the "he-meant-well" brigade.

And John's speech in the Senate: it was a great effort, and yet stupid. Why had John assumed the burden of Larry's conduct? Why had he promised to get the criminal? It looked "bad — bad!"

But this Knowles! He was capable of the stabbing, of murder in a fit of rage.

What sort of reptile was Knowles anyway? Sitting there in a bare, common room, turning himself inside out with his talk about "love" and "fascinated," and "asked her to marry me," and all that gush!—and at the same time suspecting her of stealing from him!—leaving her "in high good humour"—this "irresistible" woman!

A gentleman! He wasn't even a normal human being — just a frightened crook, trying to side-step any possible connection with the crime by assuming honesty and frankness — a simulation so obvious that it was funny.

But, if the story Knowles had told was not broken down, things would turn out badly for Thayer. So far, Thayer was the only man who could have had a motive for putting the girl out of the way—and, far worse, the only one accused by the only eye-witness.

She was alive when Knowles left her. She was dead when Marcello found her. In between those two events had been the senator's visit and his over-wrought care to have Harry repeat the message he left for her.

"Your number, sir," the chauffeur roused him. Hastings climbed the three flights of stairs to Marcello's studio and found the artist in.

"Wanted to have a little talk with you, Mr. Marcello," he said, introducing himself.

Marcello was glad to see him. "Anything I can do, Mr. Hastings," he assured warmly, "or say, to help find the man who committed that crime!"

His voice broke. He turned away, to hide his agitation. He had suffered intensely. His eyes looked sunken.

Hastings decided to get at what he wanted most while the artist was governed by emotion rather than logic. He made the interview brief.

"Did Miss Newman go to Norfolk two or three weeks ago? Do you know?"

"Yes - and she went to Knowles' office."

"What for?"

"To — in the language of fiction — denounce him. She had heard — I don't know how — he had confided to somebody his fear that she was in the pay of German interests."

"And she did denounce him?"

- "Thoroughly," Marcello said with a smile.

 "She's a woman of sudden and strong impulses."
 - "What came of it?"
- "Nothing, I believe. He promised her to make a retraction to the Department of Justice — but he didn't keep his word."

Hastings referred to the charge against her, that of being a spy. An absurdity, said Marcello.

"She was an unhappy woman, very," he informed. "But the spy charge is malicious gossip, slander."

The artist, now that he was well started, found it a great relief to talk.

- "Dr. Thayer's note," the detective inquired, published in the papers this afternoon. What do you think of it?"
- "That's another crazy thing about this case!" Marcello said hotly. "Who's supplying all this venom? I guess lots of people like to see a big man fall!"

He swung about again.

"The papers are trying to read it as an agreement between Miss Newman and Larry Thayer for her to confer with John Thayer. That's all wrong. She had an appointment with Knowles; and I knew it."

Hastings greeted this corroboration of Larry's statement with two explosive words:

"Hornswoggle me!"

He explained what Larry had said, and Knowles' denial of the pre-arranged conference.

"That's right," Marcello said: "the man's a foolish liar. Why, I had written her day before yesterday, asking if I might call last night: and she 'phoned me late yesterday afternoon that she had the appointment for last night—with Knowles."

Hastings looked around at the easels, the canvases leaning against walls and table legs and piled on half a dozen chairs.

"What's that, over there?" he demanded suddenly.

"That? An artist's portfolio — to carry sketches or drawing paper."

"Artist's portfolio? About two feet by three, wouldn't you say?"

He was thinking of the steel plate he had found in Felix Conrad's basement — two feet by three — and the portfolio no longer in Miss Newman's apartment.

His simplicity of manner, his kindliness, saying only the necessary things, and omitting those which might hurt, had won Marcello.

"Twenty-six inches by thirty-six," he corrected.

Hastings got up laboriously and examined it,

lifted it, testing its weight. He returned to his chair.

"Felix Conrad," he turned to another topic.
"Like him?"

"Oh, well enough."

"I understand he knows a great deal about art, painting — poses as an authority on it. That true?"

"He knows something about it, has a smattering of the lingo you usually hear at afternoon teas. But he really knows nothing, feels nothing about it. He's at his best on the money side of the thing: that a dozen Turners brought about sixty thousand dollars at a sale ten years ago, or that two Vandyck portraits sold for over a hundred and twenty-two thousand in nineteenhundred."

"I thought so."

Hastings stood up and said good-bye abruptly, shook hands, thanked Marcello.

He went out, striking his heels heavily against each uncarpeted step as he descended. He was thinking about Gower. How could Gower have had access to the girl's apartment without the knowledge of Harry Fields? And why did Felix Conrad want to assist Gower in his clash with the police?

Marcello, at the head of the stairs, thought of

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other things: his having called on Zimony N man last night after her message that she had engagement with Knowles — why had he d that? And why hadn't the detective asked more light on it?

He went to his cellarette and poured him a drink.

Oh, well, there was plenty of time to tell t story! It was a very simple matter, it seemed negligible, quite!

VIII

"THE SUPREMELY VERACIOUS"

R. Jefferson Hastings, continuing his study of "Society," rang the door-bell of No. 803 on the top floor of the Laiton. He wanted a conference with his old friend, Mrs. Harmon Lockridge, "the supremely veracious medium."

Here was a feature of Washington life that always amused him: the surprisingly large number of people who seriously patronized "mediums." He had heard of members of Congress applying to Mrs. Lockridge for information on how they should vote on pending legislation, or for "advance news" on the rise and fall of stocks. No wonder human life puzzled the student!—people were always doing things you thought nobody ever could do!

The negro maid who had taken his card returned: Mrs. Lockridge would see him.

He was shown into an enormous room. The walls were covered with pale-yellow silk, against which were hung brilliant things painted on silk. Over the long windows were curtains of some rich Oriental stuff, admitting the light dimly.

The glistening floor was crowded with Persian rugs. Incense curled slowly upward from a squat vase in the far corner. There were many divans piled high with cushions and pillows of every conceivable colour.

Mrs. Lockridge liked "atmosphere."

This afternoon Hastings found her leaning back lazily on a divan draped with black velvet, a background which set off admirably her excellent figure. She wore light-blue, and had pale-blue eyes.

Still handsome, her face presented habitually to the world, as it did now to Mr. Hastings, an expression eminently good-natured. The secrets of others had not saddened her.

He dropped into a big chair, and, thoroughly at home, sighed luxuriously. Without the formality of asking permission, he brought forth his knife and wood. As he whittled, he explained his haste and need of information.

"People talk to you, Florence, as much as they used to, I reckon?"

"Oh, yes," she said, indifferently, and began to smoke; "particularly the women, Jeff. They think I tell them so much; and they turn around and tell me everything. That's really why they come here: I let 'em talk."

"That's good. I'm on a big case, and I want to help a mighty sweet girl.— What do you know about a man named Conrad, Felix Conrad?"

"Felix Conrad," she said, reflectively, "born in Germany, came to America when he was ten years old, made his money in St. Louis, manufacturing soap; bitten by the Society bug; couldn't accomplish anything there; came to Washington for his winters, beginning in nineteen-six; and he's spent practically all his time here since nineteen-eleven. He 'got in' here.

"Let's see — I don't know much about him. I don't hear much about him. Repression and restraint — that's Conrad. His life's a nicely appointed carriage: and he's on the box, driving his emotions four-in-hand. Everything goes well. He bowls along the pleasant thoroughfares of culture, learning, the arts, social importance."

Mrs. Lockridge paused and watched the palegrey smoke from her cigarette.

"A pretty picture, Jeff — but what kind of a life? No out-breaks, no 'flings,' no scandal, no —let me see: no red-blooded rages, no wild devotions. It's unnatural. Where's the outlet for his energy? Something's hidden — somewhere."

"Gower," he prompted. "What about him?"

"Gower?" she echoed. "David — He served a term in the penitentiary — at Leavenworth. It was forgery."

"Before Conrad got hold of him?"

" Yes."

"Then, there's a Mrs. Fontaine," Hastings changed the subject again; "Mary Fontaine, wife of Captain Gilbert Fontaine, U. S. A.—just a sketch, Florence—a moment or two, if you've got time."

"Rich in her own right," Mrs. Lockridge did the sketch in quick words; "originally Marya Malczewski, only child of a rich Pole. She married Captain Fontaine six years ago. He's in France now. She's twenty-seven, superficially clever, but no balance, no depth. Rubens would have painted her — or Burne-Jones."

Hastings stood up.

"I want to make her talk," he said.

Mrs. Lockridge gave him a long look.

"When, Jeff?"

"Immediately."

She took from a drawer of a little black table beside her paper and a fountain pen, wrote three lines and thrust the note into an envelope which she held out, unaddressed.

"She'll talk," she said, "when you give her that."

"I don't have to read it, do I?"

"No." His question pleased her. "You're a good old boy, Jeff."

He moistened the flap of the envelope and sealed it.

"And you're a fine girl, Florence," he said in great earnest. "You've helped me a lot in a good cause."

He climbed again into his hired automobile, giving the chauffeur Mary Fontaine's address.

He reviewed his facts and ideas, checking them off one by one, relabelling them for future use:

"Gower once a convict; and, according to Florence, Conrad a crook, immoral and unmoral: I knew it as soon as I saw them. And Knowles is lying about his part in the matter — afraid of what? Afraid of being more closely associated with the Newman girl in the public's thought. A designer of ships for the government could not afford to be hooked up with anybody classified as a German spy. Neither could Gower or Conrad.

"Is that Conrad's reason for standing by Gower? Gower's 'fit' this morning, his repugnant pronouncement of a union between himself and Conrad — why that? —

"Gower, forger, ex-convict, dope-fiend, pursuer of a woman who despised him — a fine combination of qualities assembled under one skin. By tonight, I'll arrest him! Everything supports it. I'll get him tonight!"

His jubilant mood left him when he thought of Knowles again.

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"Why is Knowles lying his head off if Gower's the only one responsible for the crime?

"I reckon I'd better get my hands on that steel plate, and that sand. They'll come in handy yet, mighty handy. Now, if I could find that artist's portfolio, the one that disappeared from the girl's apartment—"

He called suddenly to the chauffeur to stop. He had caught sight of Whipple on the sidewalk, sauntering slowly through the heat.

Hastings, displaying surprising agility, got out of the car, told the chauffeur to wait. He trotted back and met Whipple.

"I'm in a big hurry," he began. "But I'm anxious to have your help."

The butler was equally anxious to give it.

- "Whipple, who put the new wire screen on the upper Eighteenth street window, third floor front?"
 - "I had it done, sir."
 - "I wonder Any special reason for it?"
- "Why, yes, sir. Mr. Gower complained of the flies up there, sir—a large number of them. He thought they came in through a hole in the screening of that window. Mr. Conrad spoke to me, sir; he directed me to repair it."
- "Had you noticed the fly pest, Whipple? They annoy you?"

- "No, sir; although my room's on the same floor back. But Mr. Gower's nervous —"
- "Ah! that explains it—fully. I'm much obliged to you, very much. It aroused my curiosity. In fact, Whipple, that whole room did that."
 - "I'm not surprised, sir."
 - "You're not?"
- "No, sir. You see, sir, Mr. Conrad had it cleared, to be made into a gymnasium. Before it could be equipped, his doctors told him he couldn't stand the strain of violent exertion."
 - "When was that approximately?"
 - "The first of last June; thereabouts."
 - "Could it have been the middle of May?"
 - "Very possibly, sir."

Something in the butler's expression, a wariness, as if to resist an impulse to talk more frankly, caught the detective's attention. He acted on it without delay.

"What is it, Whipple? When are you going to tell me?"

The man looked up and down the street. It was practically deserted, quiet, a long line of reeking asphalt under arching trees with leaves baking in the sunshine.

"Well, sir, it's this: the people in our house keep quite funny hours sometimes. As I said, my room's at the back of the third floor. Last night I didn't sleep well, sir; what with the excitement about the matter across the street, and the heat, and all."

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He stopped, to look over his shoulder.

- "Mr. Gower, sir," he got it out at last, "was awake and about, early this morning, between one and two o'clock, I think it was."
- "How do you know that?" the old man asked sharply.
- "I heard him, sir; heard him go downstairs and leave the house, and I heard him come back. He was gone about twenty minutes or half an hour."
 - "Do you know where he went?"
 - " No, sir."

The detective weighed that. Could Gower have stolen the artist's portfolio from the girl's apartment? How could he? He had no key. Harry Fields would have seen him coming in or going out. Another thing: were Knowles' blueprints hidden in the portfolio?

He went back to his car and repeated to the chauffeur Mrs. Fontaine's number.

"She's got to talk!" he thought. "Got to talk! She's got to tell me everything she knows about Zimony Newman's relations with Knowles, Larry and Marcello!

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"It's Gower or Knowles — or both of them — or is Knowles just a plain fool liar?"

He felt again for the note Mrs. Lockridge had given him. Its value to him was increasing every second.

IX

WITH THE PATIENCE OF JOB

OSALIE, summoned to her father's study in the afternoon, found him smooth and inscrutable. She could hardly realize that the man she saw now had been so lashed by emotion a few hours ago.

"I've heard about your luncheon, at the Wareham," he began, approving her. "Quite an experience, wasn't it?"

"At first; but it wasn't embarrassing after we'd reached our table."

She felt his insincerity. Why should he endorse her appearance at the Wareham with her fiancé, now accused of the attack upon Zimony Newman? It was too completely at variance with the mood in which he had practically forbidden her to go to Mary Fontaine.

Smoke from his cigarette floated between them, like a veil—symbolic of his usual attitude toward her. Since she could remember, she had been obliged to guess at what lay behind his cold, blue eyes, to speculate as to his motives and designs.

She wished that he would come into the open

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and establish a human relationship between them.

She had never loved him; he had never allowed her to love him. He had made their lives so impersonal that his terms of endearment, on the rare occasions of his using them, had the ring of hypocrisy. She had not forgotten that. But the happiness she had found in John Thayer's love had produced the wish that her father also might be enriched by affection.

- "Did you see anybody anybody of special interest?" he pursued, pleasantly curious.
- "Yes. The Assistant Secretary of State, Cameron Hough, came to our table."
 - "That simpleton!"
- "He interested me intensely. He joined us because he wanted to say he was certain he had encountered Zimony under peculiar circumstances—in a way which, if he could recall them, would be of great service to John in—this affair."
 - "What did he mean by that?"
- "I think it's clear enough," she said coolly, disliking his ridicule. "He felt sure that the whole scene, the words of it even, would come back to him; and that, when this happened, it would help us John."
 - "Another case of hazy dreams, isn't it?"
 - "It's more than that, I'm sure. I urged him

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to try to remember. Somehow, I feel it's vital.

— I wish you wouldn't laugh at it."

"Strange," Conrad said, still faintly ridiculing; but, observing her resentment, he added: "Nevertheless, it was a brave thing for you to do — going there today."

"Oh, I don't think it deserves encomium, father. One doesn't have to be very brave to believe in the man one loves."

"Perhaps, not — sometimes.— Mrs. Beale Jackson, she enjoyed it thoroughly, didn't she?"

"She seemed to."

"She would - a woman like her."

Rosalie, watching him, wondered what would come next: the real reason for his pseudo-affability.

"As I was saying, I'm glad you did it: glad you went there. It will make your next step, the obvious step, much easier, save it from criticism."

She was genuinely puzzled.

"My next step?"

"Why, yes," he replied amiably: "postpone the announcement of your engagement to marry Thayer."

That was why he had sent for her! She had no more time now to wish for his love. She must defend herself!

"Why?" she asked, eyes level with his across the desk.

"You'd hardly want the engagement announced in a newspaper column next to another column outlining evidence against him — would you?"

"I shouldn't mind one bit," she said, leaning toward him, her lips a little parted after she had spoken.

"I expected you to say that."

The admission had the sound of affectionate concern, and under that the ring of admiration. One unfamiliar with the man would have said that courage and unselfish love were the two qualities he worshipped in woman. He was smiling.

"That's why I sent for you, Rosalie. It's my duty, of course, to warn you against anything which might make you unhappy. You admit that, of course?"

"Of course."

"That, then, is my advice — don't let the announcement be published tomorrow."

He dropped both hands to the blotter and moved in his chair; he regarded the matter as settled.

She temporized.

"But the papers have it, the society editors."

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"A mere detail. They can be reached by telephone in five minutes. Let me show you."

He drew the desk 'phone to him.

"Stop, father!" she cried out, and, when he hesitated, his hand on the receiver, incredulous eyes looking into hers, she found herself biting her lower lip, trying to be silent until she could think more clearly. His assumption that he could so over-ride her purpose infuriated her.

"Besides, all my friends, all of his," she temporized further, "know the announcement will come tomorrow."

"They would be the first to applaud the wisdom of your withholding it," he said, patient, impassive, his hand still on the receiver. "Thayer himself would."

"Yes. He asked me this morning to postpone it."

"Ah! Then, those who love you are unanimous."

He moved the telephone a few inches, toward him.

"Father!" she said sharply. "I won't cancel the announcement."

A smiling martyr, an uncomplaining Job, he took his hand from the receiver.

"But, at least, you'll let me give you my reasons for suggesting it?"

She was indifferent, a study in disdain.

"You have a regard for your father, for your name. It would be folly for you to advertise tomorrow your intention to marry a man suspected of that crime, a man who may be convicted. He—"

She stopped him with a gesture, and rose, her knees trembling so that she grasped the edge of the desk for support.

"You mean you think he stabbed her?"

Her eyes searched the non-committal face.

"I don't mean any such thing."

A graceful wave of his hand disavowed the cruelty she imputed.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

He passed a hand over his well-groomed features, and sighed, obviously lamenting a universe knocked askew!

"I mean," he said, like one genuinely distressed, "there is the chance that threatens anybody accused and arrested, the chance—let me impress that upon you, the chance—of being convicted—wrongfully convicted."

He looked at her, awaiting her reply. In that moment, benignant as he seemed, Rosalie was closer to understanding him than she had ever been. Her impression was that his jealousy of John Thayer amounted to active hate.

As a matter of fact, she had touched the truth. Felix Conrad was unbelievably proud of her.

She furnished the vindication of his career. He had produced the best thing possible in flesh and blood, exactly as he had squeezed out of his soap-and-perfume business the most money and the most power possible.

Even while she tried to penetrate his reserve, he was considering her colouring, the lines of her figure, her grace of posture.

She was like rambler roses, pink and fragrant, hiding a stone wall; and yet, she was strangely like the stone wall itself, strong, fixed. Although she was motionless for the moment, little tendrils of her hair, like corn-silk, above her ears and at her neck were vibrant, tremulous with the restrained strength of her body.

She was the only thing in his life that defied his analysis and escaped his control. That, probably, explained some of his pride in her, a pride which led him even to exaggerate her charm and her beauty.

Some of all this she grasped now, for the first time. It shocked her to think that he would destroy her happiness for his selfish, impersonal pride in having her as exhibit A among the ornaments of his house! She began to persuade herself that he could not be so monstrous.

But, in the midst of the effort, she made the astonishing discovery that she could be like her father: all she had to do was to repress her emotions and call on her mental resources. She did it now, immediately and to the full, marvelling that it was so easy to feel cool, to think effectively and to prevent mere feeling from touching her.

She could hate!

For one indecisive moment she feared this capacity, recoiled from entering this heritage from him, but she conquered the repugnance. She could meet him on his own ground, fight him with the means he had spent nearly a lifetime to perfect. She felt for him no consideration whatever, she thought.

She sat down again, feeling that she looked at him across limitless fields of ice.

"I haven't the slightest idea that he'll ever be convicted, or indicted," she contested his warning.

He caught the change of her voice. Her sudden assumption of a smiling indifference equal to his own hastened his ultimatum:

"But we must understand each other, Rosalie. Even if you care to run the risk of marrying a possible criminal, I don't care to incur the ridicule and disgrace that would result from the announcement of your engagement. I don't care to — and I won't."

She flipped a bit of dust from her sleeve, was absorbed in watching its slow, jerky fall toward the floor, and finally regarded him, her lips framed to a smile, her eyes as hard as his.

"And you were going to say?" she suggested at last, her meaningless smile an irritation.

He lifted both hands, a gesture of regret.

"If my name appears in the announcements, I shall say to the newspapers that you drew too strongly on my forbearance and patience." He stopped and sighed again. Her steady, neutral gaze was hard to understand. "I shall explain that I could never consent to your marrying a man whose patriotism, as well as his—er—morals, had been so powerfully attacked."

She in her turn sighed: evidently, she despaired of his humanity and his intelligence.

"Father, you're so — Ring for Whipple, will you, please?"

He touched the button, his martyrdom excellent.

"You're so violent," she concluded her cold protest, "so unrestrained."

Her pretended sympathy stung him.

Brookes answered Mr. Conrad's ring, saying it was Whipple's afternoon off.

"Brookes," she directed, "call the morning newspapers on the telephone, and ask for the society editor of each. When she answers, tell her, please, that Miss Conrad will call her at eight

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this evening, to give her a correction in the announcement of her engagement."

She made him repeat what she had said.

When he had left the room, she rose to her feet, composed, dignified, grave.

Thunderstruck as he was, Felix still seemed incurious, dispassionate, watching her out of eyes hard and unwinking.

"You're too much a slave to your love of me," she said in mock distress. "Your emotions run away with you." The sarcasm was merciless. "It's so hard for you to think wisely when you feel warmly."

A wave of his hand expressed in return his mock gratitude for her sympathy. But he held his tongue. The silence grew, became insupportable.

"If," she said, "at eight o'clock tonight you refuse to sponsor the announcement, I shall notify the papers to omit, in their articles, any reference whatever to you. No matter how you ignore it, the fact remains that, in this, your agreement is unnecessary."

l.e indulged himself to the extent of a query.

"You've made up your mind, Rosalie?" She was languid, almost apathetic.

"If John wished it and had the time," she let

the words fall, one by one, heavy with finality, "had the time this afternoon, I'd marry him at six o'clock." She went slowly toward the door. "Is that all, father?"

He had never felt such anger. It sanded his throat. Outwardly, however, he was unaffected, master of himself. His hands lay relaxed upon the blotter; his eyes followed her progress to the door.

He realized that he was beaten; but he could still think. Like any bully in defeat, he was willing to temporize, to "save his face."

"Yes," he replied, clinging to his rôle, grief and disappointment finely blended in his voice; "that's all, I think — except that, if Thayer is guilty, if facts brought out this afternoon and this evening show him culpable — in that event, you would acknowledge the wisdom of my position?"

"Why, yes," she assented to that, her hand on the door-knob. Suddenly, she wanted to punish him fully, to prolong his suspense. "And, instead of eight, it will be eleven before I talk to the society reporters. The change can be made then — if necessary."

"Thanks," he acknowledged the compromise.
"We shall be in accord yet." He was gracious, applauding her. "At eleven, then."

He turned slightly from her, his face imper-

turbable still, his hand steady as he drew open a drawer of the desk.

She left the room, languor in her movements. She went upstairs, her face flaming. In her room, she locked the door and threw herself upon the bed, weeping, condemning herself.

She would never be that sort of woman again, she told herself, never, no matter what happened! How easy it was to be cool, and contemptuous, and to hate! Cruelty was nothing but a low trick, a slipping out of one's ordinary moods and throttling one's best and finest feeling.

But the regression was too easy; and the temptation to hurt others and see them writhe under the punishment was terrible! Worse than that: she would grow into the habit of that behaviour if she did not watch herself.

She sprang up and examined her face in the mirror. In her over-wrought state of mind she had feared that the ugliness of the scene had imprinted on it some trace of hardness. She felt relieved when she saw that this had not happened.

Memory of what she had planned — a help to John — rushed upon her. She had made an appointment with Mary Fontaine, and forgotten it! That was an example of how an evil mood might affect one. She looked at her watch: she had plenty of time. She unlocked her door and rang

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'for Aline. Absorption in what she hoped to accomplish prevented her thinking of how she had increased her father's hatred of John.

Thayer himself was to discover that.

\mathbf{X} .

GOWER GOES TO HEADQUARTERS

ENATOR THAYER, calling at the Department of Justice, was informed that Mr. Hastings was out. He declined to wait. More successful than the police, he had obtained from Harry Fields important information, on which he proposed to act at once. The Attorney General could do what he wanted.

After interviewing the Cabinet official, he attended to one more legal matter, securing a warrant and arranging to have it used.

Would Hastings disapprove? Hardly. He was accomplishing one of the things the detective had described as advisable.

When he rang the Conrad bell and asked for his future father-in-law, Brookes showed him into the study.

Felix was at his desk, an elbow on the blotter, a hand on a drawer pulled half-open. Rosalie had left him barely three minutes ago; and his rage had not diminished. Still the actor, however, he was suave and affable.

"I hope," Thayer said, "you haven't been too much annoyed by this wretched affair."

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"Applying the word 'wretched' to — what, or whom?" Felix countered.

"Miss Newman, first of all, and then the reaction upon Rosalie, yourself, me."

Thayer, watching the hard, set face, perceived the active hostility behind the smile with which Conrad answered:

"It's something that's liable to come to anybody, Thayer. The only thing that matters is how we meet it—and dispose of it."

"Just now, I'm afraid," Thayer went to the point, "it's bound to be more or less trouble-some."

" How?"

"Before I go further, Mr. Conrad"—Against his will, he spoke formally—"I shall ask you to remember that my greatest concern is for your daughter."

"Yes?" The monosyllable refused co-operation.

Thayer hesitated no longer.

"I'd like to ask your secretary, Gower, a few questions."

"That," said Felix, "must be between you and him."

"You mean, you refuse to help me in getting at a few facts, facts vitally important to me, and to others?"

Conrad exerted himself sufficiently to regret, even to reprove.

"Thayer, you're so hasty!" he lamented with a sigh. "I've intended several times to speak of it to you. That is, if I might do so without presumption?"

"Certainly, Mr. Conrad," Thayer agreed, although he was sure that valuable time was being lost in this mock interest.

"Then, if I may say so," Felix tempered his suggestion with a smile, "you waste your mental strength. I suggest that you and my secretary must deal with the matters—er—of interest to you both; and you at once jump, I may say leap, to the conclusion that I refuse to be of help to you. Why?"

"Because I've had the impression that you were devoted to your secretary — an impression that's strengthened by your refusal to help me now."

"You mean — is it possible that Gower knows anything further about this case than his positive assertion that you stabled the woman?"

Thayer's patience was exhausted. He refused to submit any longer to this masked ridicule.

"We're only losing time, Mr. Conrad," he said.
"I mean I've already accused Gower of burglary. His arrest is a matter of a few minutes."

"Burglary?"

"Burglary, forcible entry of apartment Number Thirty-five in the Melwood early this morning, and the removal of property. It had occurred to me that you, as well as I, might be interested in hearing the fellow's denial."

"Excuse me," Conrad said, suddenly decisive, going toward the door, "for just a minute."

Thayer thought that this leaving the room might be for the purpose of warning Gower, on the house telephone. Felix returned almost immediately, and was in his chair again before he spoke.

"Of course, you've evidence supporting such a charge?"

"The man who saw it."

Felix leaned back, resting his chin on the finger-ends of both hands. He kept his staring eyes fastened on those of his guest.

"There seems to be," he complained, "a conspiracy to bring me and my household into this Newman affair. And I resent it. Frankly, the absurdity of trying to connect anybody in my house with anything touching a German spy is so pronounced that it ceases to amuse me. I particularly resent this — in another man I would call it nonsense — this pose of yours as a detective. It keeps you running in here to confer with Rosalie, to question Gower, and so on. It occurs to me that you might let matters take

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their course. Why this hot-headed plunge into the limelight? If —"

Thayer rose abruptly.

"Since you don't care to co-operate, I —" Felix held up a protesting hand.

"Don't misunderstand me, my dear fellow: my indignation, however intense it may be, doesn't destroy my faculty of thought. I'll have Gower in—"

As he put out his hand to touch the desk buzzer, the door opened, disclosing Gower.

It was not an accident. The senator was sure of that. The secretary had been there, awaiting a signal from Conrad ever since Conrad's brief absence from the room.

"Ah, Gower! — I was about to ring for you. Our — my friend, the senator, wanted a word with you."

"Merely to tell you," Thayer said pointedly, "what you probably know now: I've charged you with burglary."

Gower had come into the room far enough to push the door shut behind him. He seemed in normal condition now, free of nervousness, wary and alert.

"What!" he said loudly.

"Burglary: you entered Miss Newman's apartment early this morning and took from there some of her property."

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"Burglary! I!" The secretary turned to his employer. "Mr. Conrad! Is this man insane?"

Mr. Conrad's tolerant smile deprecated the idea.

"Do you deny that you did what I've just said?"

Gower produced his cigarette case.

"Most certainly." His lip curled. "When I made my statement this morning to Major Ross, I finished with the matter."

He lit a cigarette.

"You did?" Thayer pricked him. "You're mistaken, Mr. Gower, grievously misled. You removed from that apartment a drawing portfolio, the one on which Miss Newman's head was resting when Dr. Riley found her. You entered the Melwood basement and crawled up the stairs to the apartment, thinking you were not seen.

"You picked the lock, you went into Number Thirty-five, and you came out with what you went after! Furthermore, you left as you had come, tiptoeing down the three flights of stairs and out through the basement door! Now, deny that, any part of it, if you can!"

The violent anger Thayer had expected did not materialize.

"Oh," Gower said, shrugging, "why deny it to you, Senator?" He laughed a little, pretend-

ing amusement. "Honestly, when you come to think of it, it is funny, isn't it - my accusing you of the stabbing this morning, and here this afternoon vou accuse me of burgling the woman's home?"

Thayer, ignoring Conrad, went to the door.

"That's all you've got to say?"

Gower blew the ashes from his cigarette tip.

"Why, yes - except that the man who gave you such a cock-and-bull story as this is the most arrant liar I ever heard of."

Thayer turned at last to Felix.

"You were right, Mr. Conrad. It's a waste of time for me to try even to talk to Mr. Gower. I'm sorry I disturbed you."

Felix, apparently oblivious of the apology, wanted information: "Who will make the arrest?"

- "A policeman. He's outside now."
- "Ah-h. So you had it all arranged beforehand?"
 - "I told you so, sir."
- "Suppose," Conrad began, but broke off, glancing at his secretary. "What about it, David?"
- " I'll go to police headquarters if if this man intends to push the thing through," Gower answered the glance.

Felix agreed: "The quiet way's the best way — invariably."

Gower did not reply to that. His eyes opened wide and stared into space. His jaw dropped. His cigarette fell from his lower lip to the floor, making little showers of sparks as it struck his belt and his knee. His arms swung loosely at his sides. Arching inward at the waist, as he had done that morning in the Newman apartment, he sank down slowly.

This time there was no chair to support him. He crumpled slowly to the floor, would have fallen prostrate but for Conrad who sprang forward to help him.

Thayer had sufficient presence of mind to watch Conrad, whose face remained unchanged while Gower lay against his knee, inert.

"If you'll excuse us?" Felix suggested. "He'll recover in a few minutes. He always does."

Thayer was on the point of complying with the hint, but he hesitated when Gower's body shook convulsively. In spite of Felix's effort to hold him still, he sat up, raising both his hands as he had raised them a few hours ago in denouncing the senator. His face, in spite of the closed eyes, was eloquent of contempt. He was like a man trying to escape contact with a noisome object.

"Conrad - Conrad and myself," he said, shud-

dering, his queer, rumbling voice keyed more to horror than distress.

For a moment Felix was off his guard: his expression was savage, malevolent. He looked up, the flame of anger leaving his eyes the moment he focused them on Thayer.

But the revelation had been there. Conrad was under Gower's control, in some way, to some degree. That was patent.

"Mixed up with that—" Gower, his head turning slowly from side to side, spoke again, with a sorrow that was sincere.

"David!" Felix interrupted sharply, fortifying the word with physical pressure on his shoulder.

Gower opened his eyes, looking first at Conrad, then at Thayer. Felix helped him to his feet. Nobody referred to the seizure.

"You were saying," Thayer broke the silence, "you'd go to headquarters."

"Yes," Gower retorted weakly. "I prefer to have the thing straightened out — bail and so forth."

"In that event, we'll make the trip together." Conrad said nothing as they went out. The senator's bow to him brought only a wave of his

hand, indicating neither warmth nor coldness.

Thayer, leaving the house, thought again of Rosalie. Tragedy was ahead of her — perhaps,

humiliation. He had said in his speech in the Senate that he wanted the truth, no matter who might be hurt by it. And already, within this brief space, one person threatened was the woman he was to marry.

No man could be under Gower's dominion and escape punishment; and Felix Conrad was in fear of Gower, had showed it plainly, had proved it by voice and look.

It was monstrous if Gower, implicated in the crime, could count on, or compel, his employer's help because at some time in the past — possibly in something reprehensible — he, Gower, had helped, or saved, the employer. But was that true?

If true, it explained why Conrad had resented, from the very outset, anything that might prove a connection of his household with Zimony Newman. That was why he had taken Gower's part! He dreaded the mere idea of Gower's being implicated in it, or arrested, because he knew that he would have to champion Gower, try to save Gower, and, in doing so, would run the risk of hurting himself.

"So," decided Thayer, "he's against us, and for himself. And I don't know why it surprised me. It's characteristic of him: Felix Conradian through and through."

XI

FELIX JOINS THE HUNT

Trequired no special powers of divination to see that Mary Fontaine was surprised by Mr. Conrad's call. Felix saw it the moment he entered the room. He perceived also, back of the surprise, a very palpable uneasiness.

To dispel that uneasiness was the first task to which he addressed himself. Determined to secure fair play for his secretary, he would not only succeed; he would succeed brilliantly.

He danced on the cobwebs of finesse. Anxiety was no more audible in his voice than the slow fall of a rose petal in a far garden. Contradiction and dispute were no louder in Mrs. Fontaine's drawingroom than the contact of a submarine with the dorsal fin of a deep-sea fish. For him, impatience had ceased to exist.

His eyes, watching hers, were as sensitive to line and colour as an artist's, awaiting the afternoon moment when shadows change from mauve to purple. Betraying none of his own thought, he mentally disarmed her, took from her all her equipment of concealment and deception.

They conversed at first lightly, cleverly, in

the charming manner of people whose business it is to see to it that the world and its vagaries shall yield them daily entertainment.

Mr. Conrad evinced, finally, a slight curiosity about Miss Newman, the well-bred man's desire to keep abreast of anything interesting.—What, for instance? — Her personality, perhaps; or her tastes.— Mrs. Fontaine was silent, her dark eyes reflective.

Felix presented a suggestion; he became, as it were, a pebble, to stir gently the pool of her meditation.

"The newspapers' assumption that she's a spy —"

"Oh, ridiculous!" Mary brushed aside the idea. "I never knew a woman more intensely American."

"Indeed?"

"Why, yes! Her Magyar extraction means nothing to her. She was pro-ally before we declared war."

Only a man of Conrad's highly developed sensitiveness to sound could have caught the slight overtone of Mrs. Fontaine's denial.

He went further, sure of safety:

"The longer I live in Washington, the more thunder-struck I am at the readiness of officials to believe the worst."

Of whom? He replied to that with reluctance:

why, of Miss Newman — and some of her associates.

Mrs. Fontaine was silent again. She could not quite make him out. She was apprehensive.

"No longer than an hour ago," he deplored, "I was told that evidence had been found, evidence that she is a spy."

"And you, Mr. Conrad?" she inquired, exhibiting an interest which, at best, was clouded by languor. "You, more than any man in this country, have made yourself an authority on such matters."

She put her hand to the glossy waves of her dark hair. What were spies, after all, if one's personal appearance was attractive? Such was the impression she sought to give him.

He laughed, his mirth deprecatory.

"In the usual case, that evidence would have appealed to me as unanswerable."

"That Zimony Newman's a spy!" Even now her interest was forced, a polite concession to his chatter.

He became a spur, to goad her self-interest:

" Not a German spy."

There was in her eyes now the look he had hoped for. He waited.

"What, then?" she was forced to ask at last, languor falling from her.

"That," he said, "before I answer it, reminds

me of the good work you've done for your cause, for the independence of Poland. I've been remiss in waiting so long to congratulate you."

He put into that assertion a new quality, a tang his other remarks had not had. He knew what he was talking about.

What he had learned and guessed of Zimony's plans and peculiarities made the sureness doubly sure. She had not told Mary of her German interest, even if she had any: she had played safe, had secured Mary's co-operation with the subterfuge that she worked for Poland and for Poland only.

"You do me too much honour, Mr. Conrad," Mrs. Fontaine demurred. "The few public addresses I've delivered, the raising of a fund—Do you smoke?"

He took a cigarette, and held the lighter to hers. He was deliberate—a sedative to her anxiety.

"I had forgotten that," he reproached himself.
"I was thinking of bigger work—" He paused, to return the lighter to its place. "— and more dangerous."

Her apprehension grew. As plainly as if she had written it on paper and handed the writing to him, he knew she was debating, "What does he know?"

He continued, saying the things he was certain

would please her, deliberately prolonging her inner debate. Flattery hung on the air; admiration punctured his discourse; he was a vandal breeze, stealing away the fragrance of her thought, and at the same time bending the flower of her indecision in the direction of his own design.

"More dangerous?" she finally returned to his characterization of her work. "I'm afraid I'm obtuse."

He did not break the pause that followed.

"What did you mean by that, Mr. Conrad?" The question was flat and direct, but he caught its real meaning. It was a capitulation.

"A tribute to your method — and results," he said blandly.

He wanted to make her come still further. His manner told her that, and at the same time assured her that she would find in him a helper, a glove for the hand of her high endeavour.

"So," she said slowly, "you know — what?" Hedid not exult. Nevertheless, his position was improving.

"I merely wanted to ask you," he said, "about a note, or a message — shall I say? — left with you by Miss Newman."

"A note?" she repeated, her perplexity a burden.

He had not made a study of deceit for nothing.

He had the situation in his hand! Her query was confession of having a note.

She had it and knew nothing of its contents—except that it was about Poland. The world assumed a rosier aspect. That he also had not the slightest idea of what the note contained, was a minor matter just then. He had made this call as a necessary part of his scheme to find out anything and everything relating to the Newman woman. And success was his at the first venture—surprising success, because he had expected to unearth a note from her no more than from a man in Mars.

He had guessed it, caught up the idea from what she had said! Luck was still with him: and he had done away with another chance of having Gower advertised as interested in a spy.

Mrs. Fontaine spoke rapidly, denying again any close association with Zimony's "work." He watched her. He was kind, patient even.

"But," he insisted still, "there was a note—something of that kind."

"For you?"

"For me or —." He smiled. "Why fence like this, you and I?" he inquired. "Miss Newman's accused of being a German agent, and — well, you and I run risks, hiding notes."

She rose quickly and went to the window. Outside, the newsboys were crying afternoon

papers, yelling a headline, "Knowles Denies Murder!"

She was trying to think, but this man, reading her thoughts, jumping to conclusions, always the right conclusions, had confused her. In one way, he was a threat, and she did not like him. In another, he was fair, reasonable, and — if trouble did come too near later, he could help her.

Knowles might be exonerated — Felix Conrad might be right: she faced the possibility of being implicated.

She went toward the door of her library, and again hesitated, not meeting his glance.

"And yet-"

She hung between promises to the wounded, unconscious woman and anxiety for her own comfort.

"If it leaves us in the least doubt," he fortified her, "we shall be able to meet it better —"

He heard the opening and heavy closing of the front door, a sound hardly distinguishable. Mrs. Fontaine had not heard it. She went into the library.

He exhaled a long breath which was almost language. He was entitled, he thought, to some demonstration of his pleasure. When the note—

A noise caught his attention. He wheeled, and saw Rosalie standing in the doorway, sur-

prised and questioning. At the same moment Rosalie, glancing over his shoulder, saw Mrs. Fontaine come in from the library, an envelope in her hand.

There was a brief space of time in which nobody spoke.

Rosalie's "Why, father!" started the flow of words.

Mrs. Fontaine, crossing the room to her, protested that her exclamation sounded like a rebuke for his being there.— Not at all! She had thought he was occupied elsewhere.

"We were on the ever-green subject of war," Felix enlightened her.

Rosalie was not so composed as her father. Rearranging errant ends of her veil, she glanced into a mirror on her right. Without intention on her part, she had in the glass a picture of what was done behind her.

While Felix talked, she saw Mary go to the centre of the room and, directing him with a look, put the envelope on the table. Conrad saw and understood the move — and informed Mary that he understood it.

The facial trick with which he accomplished that was so slight and yet so legible that Rosalie recoiled physically, hating this proof of his skill in deception. Moreover, she found in it final evidence of a secret relationship between him and Mary Fontaine, a connection she had never suspected.

Turning from the mirror, she was struck by their blankness of expression. It was too well done, and proclaimed a determination to keep from her the reason of their being together.

Contributing only monosyllables to the conversation, she came swiftly to the conclusion that Mary Fontaine might help her father in his campaign to exonerate Gower. And that might mean injury to John Thayer! There had been rumours about Mary Fontaine's "work." Was it possible that Mary and Zimony both had deceived her?

What could this surreptitious communication, this secret note, indicate if it was not a menace to somebody? And her father hated John! If she were in possession of the note, she might be put in a position to save her fiancé from suspicion, or something worse.

She did not stop to consider her own excitement, the effects of a day calculated to throw the most lethargic of women off her balance. She was thinking with all her accustomed clearness, she was sure.

Her mind was made up: she would get that envelope; if possible, get it without their knowledge.

They were still standing, each nursing a spe-

cial design, each moving restlessly toward this or that chair, when John Thayer, fresh from his Gower-Conrad-headquarters work, was announced.

It was Rosalie's moment. As the others turned toward Thayer, she stepped quickly to the table and picked up the note. Matter-of-fact and without hesitating, as if she had not stopped at the table at all, she went the remaining distance to the window. With her back to the others, it was the work of an instant to hide the envelope in her corsage.

Facing them again, she saw that neither her father nor Mary suspected what she had done. John Thaver's face alone baffled her. She could not tell whether he had seen her get possession of the note or whether he wondered why she had turned away at his arrival.

An instant later Conrad, during his graceful withdrawal from the room, told Mary Fontaine with a look that the letter had disappeared. His smooth exterior was unruffled, his urbanity untouched. As usual, he paid no tribute to disappointment.

Almost, Rosalie admired his amazing poise.

XII

HASTINGS DELIVERS HIS LETTER

OSALIE, realizing that Thayer's search for helpful evidence had brought him to Mrs. Fontaine, did not linger.

She stopped only long enough to say she had just come from the hospital: Zimony was still unconscious: an operation might be necessary within a few hours: her case puzzled the physicians: she had a good chance to live.

The senator, alone with Mrs. Fontaine, dealt exclusively in blunt, direct questioning. Coming so soon after her battle of wits with Felix Conrad, he was a downright amusement for her. He was so obvious in all things!

But she was eager to help the senator, she said. She would do anything, tell anything! But what? — Unfortunately, she knew nothing.— She and Zimony were friends, but of what avail was that? — She lit a cigarette.—

She rose, unable to restrain her concern for the vanished note. She had been searching with her eyes the table, the floor, chairs. She now handled the various objects on the table, picking them up and setting them down again, frankly

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looking for something of great value. She saw no reason for concealing the search from Thayer. He knew nothing about it.

The senator, with Rosalie's appropriation of the note fresh in his mind, watched her, his bewilderment increased by her excitement, her evident fright.

He did not like Mrs. Fontaine. This black-haired, erotic woman, smoking cigarettes, in this exotic atmosphere, was not the sort to arouse his admiration. And he was not so dense that he failed to note her lack of interest in him and his errand.

Having brought his fruitless visit to an end, he went again to the Department of Justice.

Mr. Hastings, however, was not in his office. Calling on Mrs. Fontaine soon after the senator's departure, he helped her to round out the most exciting afternoon she had ever had in all her twenty-eight years.

At first he amused her more even than Thayer had done. The baggy clothes, the steel-rimmed spectacles, and his simple, trusting expression led her to a sad consideration of the small-calibre minds the government employed for important work.

"I won't detain you long, I hope, Mrs. Fontaine," he said. "You can get rid of me at once — by telling me all you know about things

that happened at the Melwood — yesterday and last night."

She began to treat him as she had treated the senator, effusive with her sham desire to tell everything. But in a few moments, with a dismay that bordered the comical, she realized the futility of these tactics here.

While she rattled on, indulging in all that little feminine byplay which she did so well, his scrutiny bothered her. She finished at last her enumeration of a great many facts, none of them enlightening.

He mentioned an incident which, strangely enough, he said, seemed to have escaped her memory:

"You were in Miss Newman's apartment yesterday afternoon, I think."

"Yes, I was; but that wasn't --"

"For a long time?"

He interrupted her disclaimer as if he wished to save her from the consequence of too positive a denial. She recognized that; and the fact that he could afford to be generous with her increased her confusion.

"Oh, no," she said; "not a long time."

"Perhaps, we have different ideas of what a long time is."

"Perhaps," she repeated, wary.

"Two hours?"

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"No; not that long, I think."

She was careful now. He no longer appeared grotesque.

"It was half-past three when you and she came in from the street; went up to Number Thirtyfive?"

She considered.

"Now that I think of it, yes."

"And it was a quarter past five when Mr. Knowles telephoned her?"

She appraised his attitude: it was that of a man thoroughly sure of himself. Frankness, partial frankness, she concluded, would be advisable for her.

"I think it was," she said, deliberative, a thread of smoke curling from the corner of her lips. "It must have been. I left the Melwood at half-past five."

"That straightens us out," he congratulated himself as much as he did her; "I mean about the long time. You were there two hours."

"Why, yes! I had no idea!"

She was thinking: he got his information from the day telephone operator, Miss Fanning; he knew nothing vital.

He was silent, looking at her steadily over the steel rims, leaning toward her.

"Well?" she finally exclaimed, irritated by his waiting pose.

"The conversation between Miss Newman and Mr. Knowles; can't you tell me what that was about?"

"Why, no!"

"Why not?"

" I didn't hear it."

She regretted the lie as soon as she had spoken it; rather, she regretted that she had done it clumsily.

"Too bad - bad!" He drew in his lower lip, as if to save it from too much speech. apartment's so small, you know."

She was tired, exhausted in mind and body, and wanted to get rid of him. He persisted so. "clung!"

"Her private 'phone's at the head of her bed," she explained; "and I was in the reception room, a closed door between us."

Mr. Hastings showed a deeper interest.

"So he called her on the private wire.—Her number listed in the directory?"

" No."

"He knew it beforehand, the private number? That's interesting, very. Who closed the door so that she could talk without being overheard?"

His last query was quick, like a challenge.

"Zimony."

He shook his head, disappointed.

"And you heard nothing she said?" He was

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talking to himself, gazing through the window. "Too bad! It really is." His glance returned to her. "How did you know she was talking to Mr. Knowles?"

"She told me.— After she'd talked to him."

"And you can't tell me anything more about it?"

"My dear sir," she said, exasperated beyond her patience, "what does all this repetition mean? Do you doubt my word?"

The expression of his eyes had shocked her: he was sorry for her!

"You women!" His exclamation was like sympathy. He paused again, and looked at her a little sadly. "I'm an old man, Mrs. Fontaine; and I know something of the world — and the people in it. Good people, they are — and kind. I try to be kind myself. Take my advice — tell me what Miss Newman and Mr. Knowles talked about."

He put his hand into his pocket and fingered the envelope Mrs. Harmon Lockridge had given him.

Mrs. Fontaine resented his tone. Her eyes grew wider, blazing with the unnatural light which a violent woman can produce at will. She gave way to rage, worked herself into a mood of recklessness that defied him.

"Really!" she said, body quivering, teeth

clenched. "I never imagined such insolence, such impudence! Leave this room —" She rose and pointed to the door. "— and the house!"

He rose also, regarding her out of eyes she thought less friendly.

"I'm sorry I can't, Mrs. Fontaine."

He was invested now with a dignity she had not observed until that moment.

Before she could reach the library door, he was in front of her. She realized now, clearly, the quality of his strength. Irresolute, making no further effort to leave the room, she waited for anything he might do.

He surprised her by drawing forward a chair. The bow with which he forced her to take it was graceful, illustrative of the deference in which he held women. Convinced that her rage meant nothing to him, she abandoned it as suddenly as she had developed it.

He surprised her again.

"That's very good of you," he said, complimenting her surrender as if she had willed it without compulsion from him. "I was wondering if you —" He stopped and smiled.

"You're a musician, aren't you?" he inquired, making clear his knowledge of her reputation as a pianist.

"In a way."

"I was wondering if you wouldn't tell me,

quite frankly, and of course confidentially, what you think of Mr. Felix Conrad's musical taste. It's information I must get, and I'd rather have it from you."

As if an alliance with the detective were the most natural thing in the world, entirely forgetful of his "impudence," she complied:

"He has a fair amount of the jargon; he can talk it very well. But music, the soul of music, is Sanscrit to him."

"Exactly what I expected," the old man thanked her. "Marcello said it about his art, pictures."

He put his hands behind him and paced the floor, coat flapping, trousers bagging to unthinkable shapes and wrinkles. He reached a decision, stopped in front of her.

"Now, about Knowles?"

She imagined that he had played with her, tried to win her confidence with the talk about Conrad. He saw her new indignation. Realizing the futility of friendly persuasion, he took Mrs. Lockridge's note from his pocket and, without a word of explanation, handed it to her.

While she tore open the envelope, he went to the window. He stood there a long time, hearing nothing from her after the crackle of the heavy note paper as she unfolded it.

When he did go back to her, his heart sank.

His one emotion was pity. Florence had written well.

Mrs. Fontaine was still. Colour was gone from her cheeks and lips. If she was breathing, it was so slowly as not to move the lace at her breast. Her arms and hands, one on an arm of the chair, the other at her side, were limp.

Before he spoke, her right foot, which had been crossed over her left, slipped to the floor, and the change in her attitude dislodged the note. It slid to the carpet. That heightened the inanimate element of the picture. The movement of her foot and the fall of the paper were so evidently independent of her volition.

She had no volition.

When she looked up, he found himself gazing into eyes that were blank. They expressed no thought, no feeling.

"Look," he said gently.

He picked up the note, and, igniting it at the blue flame of the cigarette lighter, held it between forefinger and thumb until all but a blank corner of it was consumed. He was not sure that she knew what he had done.

She was the first to speak.

"You asked about Zimony and Mr. Knowles. I'll tell you."

Her voice was metallic, a monotone, sounding like neither fear nor interest, the words coming unemphasized. They were lifeless, the ghosts of language.

"Zimony and I were in her reception room when her telephone bell rang. She went into the bedroom and answered it. The door want closed between us. I heard everything she said. The man who'd called her — she told me after wards his name was Knowles — evidently asked her to let him call last night. She refused. Her voice was insulting."

Mrs. Fontaine stopped and passed her right hand across her forehead.

"Then," she proceeded, unaware of having paused, "he said something that made her change her mind. It must have been a threat. She said, 'You wouldn't dare! You couldn't be so insane!'"

"But he was that insane, it seemed. Zimony didn't argue with him at any length. She made the appointment with him for last night at a quarter past eight. When she came back from the bedroom, she was angry; and I asked her no questions.

"She went to her desk and wrote. She put what she had written into an unaddressed envelope, and gave it to me."

The monotonous stream of words stopped again. This time Hastings felt that his ears needed rest. The effect of her metallic utter-

nce was like that of tiny hammers beating on is eardrums.

Looking past him, into space, she frowned.

"I'll tell you all of it." She voiced the anouncement at last with the lifelessness that had uzzled him since she had begun. "'Don't be arprised, Mary,' she said, 'and don't ask questions you know I won't answer. If anything appens to me, give this note to the person who sks for it — after any accident to me, or my suden disappearance.'

"She was so matter-of-fact then that what she aid didn't strike me at the time as particularly larming. Later, though, I said, 'Why, Zimony, here's no address on this envelope!' And she aid, 'That doesn't matter. The person who sks you for it will be the one it's meant for. live it without anybody else knowing about it.'

"I told her I'd follow her instructions. 'Renember, Mary,' she warned me again, 'he — or he — is to have it after I'm out of the city — rout of the world. Not that I expect anything happen, really. It's just a precaution. A nan like Knowles is capable of making trouble.'"

The narrative halted. Hastings thought it had ome to its end.

"That note: where is it?"

She closed her eyes, the lids falling gradually, ike the "slow curtain" of the theatre.

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"Mr. Conrad, Felix Conrad, called on me this afternoon. He was beating around with his devil-taught cleverness. He suspected that I had information he could use — in his anti-spy campaign, I think. I see now he knew nothing. But it's too late now. He got the best of me, and I gave him the note."

Her eyes were still closed, her head against the back of the chair.

"I mean I tried to give it to him. I got it from the little safe in the library there but, when I got back here, Rosalie Conrad had come in. I remembered Zimony's caution that the letter was to be delivered secretly; and I put it on the table. He knew I intended him to pick it up without being seen. Before he could do so, Senator Thayer came in.

"The next thing I knew, the note had disappeared, and Felix Conrad was telling me with his glance that he had failed to get it."

"Who did get it?"

She opened her eyes and looked at him without interest.

"I don't know," she answered him.

She was telling the truth, he was sure. And her long story had led him into a blind alley—unless he could find the new possessor of the note. Rosalie, Felix Conrad or John Thayer—any

Tad, for some unknown purpose, might have deceived her in denying possession of it.

She sat up straight, and, holding her hands in front of her, inspected them minutely. She was like a baby discovering its own anatomy. It was the weirdest thing she had done.

"Just a moment," he said, "and you won't be bothered any more."

Her lips curled — lifted, showing her teeth. The change reminded him of a woman throwing off the effects of anesthesia.

"You," she spoke harshly; "you're considerate, aren't you?"

Her sarcasm did not touch him, his sympathies were so strongly with her. He reviewed matters swiftly. There was nothing more she could tell him. She sat, hands limp in her lap, her head lowered. He again doubted her full consciousness.

"The note I gave you," he said finally; "you saw me burn it?"

She made no response. He was distressed by the inescapable fear that he had changed her personality for life. She looked so different, so destroyed.

"I hadn't read it," he blurted out with a man's awkwardness in trying to console.

"I guess not!" she said, her sarcasm so bitter that it made her even more pathetic.

Despairing of winning her belief, he pulled his hat from his pocket, but made no move to leave.

"Why don't you go?" she asked him, raising her eyes to his.

She was no longer dazed, he saw; but his guess had been correct. The thing she had done, the thing Florence had described in the note, had not hurt her so long as she thought she had hidden it; but the fact that it had gone beyond her control had struck her with terrible result. He could see that already there was in her eyes an evil light.

Without speaking, he went slowly out of her house.

On the way to his office, he checked up his results:

"Knowles stabbed Zimony Newman. That's clear. We've got his motive, belief that she had stolen his plans, and, perhaps, jealousy; and we've got his threat, indicated by the girl's fear after he had telephoned; and we've got his own consciousness of guilt, shown by his denial of having had an appointment with her.

"Conrad and Gower, their concern's indirect," he satisfied himself. "They're afraid of some-

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thing that may be brought out by the prosecution of Knowles. I'll get that, too."

He gave the chauffeur new direction: "The Melwood first."

He wanted to see Dr. Riley.

XIII

THE PHONOGRAPH TRICK

HE detective encountered another difficulty. Dr. Riley had been called to Baltimore for an emergency operation. He would be back by nine that evening.

Returning to his office, Hastings found John Thayer waiting for him. The senator detailed the story told by Harry Fields about Gower's burglary of the Newman apartment.

"And here's another thing," said Thayer. "Knowles is left-handed — or, perhaps, ambidextrous."

"Then a part of Gower's story is true!" exclaimed the old man. "He said you stabbed her with your left hand."

"And there's the chance that he mistook Knowles for me."

"But not so fast," cautioned Hastings. "How did the boy know Knowles was left-handed?"

"He noticed that Knowles kept his loose change in his left trousers-pocket, and that he held the tip in his left hand until he gave it to Harry. Also, Harry says, he handled his hat that night with his left hand altogether. 'Mos' men,' the boy told me, 'does dat wif thar right han's — all de time in de elevatuh.'"

"Then," commented the detective, "if Dr. Riley says Miss Newman's wound came from a left-handed stab, Knowles is as good as convicted."

He sketched the facts already established against the inventor.

"Briefly," the senator supplemented, "Miss Newman feared injury from his hands, and got it."

"Only two more items are needed to round out the case: first, the fact that Gower, loaded with morphine, mistook Knowles for you in the stabbing scene; and, second, an answer to this: how, after being wounded, did Miss Newman start that phonograph?"

"The second's the one I'm worrying about. Nobody will accept his identification of me."

Hastings quit talking, his mind on the phonograph puzzle.

"Fine of the Attorney General, wasn't it?" Thayer said gratefully; "arranging things as I asked: keeping Gower locked up until tomorrow—or later if we say so?"

"No joke about that!" Hastings threw off his absent-mindedness. "Let that dope die down in him, son, and he'll tell us all we want—in words of one syllable!"

Thayer had made no reference to Rosalie's present possession of the note, preferring to leave it to her judgment. The detective, in his turn, kept away from Mrs. Fontaine's story. For one thing, he was not sure of the truth of all its statements. He reserved the right to investigate them elsewhere.

The senator having left—"for a word with Miss Conrad," he explained— Hastings attacked the problem of why Gower and Conrad displayed frank concern in a crime of which Knowles was patently guilty. What was the issue that dragged them into it?

Were they afraid of Knowles? Or were they afraid of each other?

He began to whittle.— Half an hour later his telephone rang.

Rosalie Conrad was on the wire, asking him to come to her at once, assuring him:

"You won't regret it. It's evidence — you'll see — about the Knowles personage!"

He hung up the receiver, thinking: "More facts — or more muddle-fuddle? If she's got something new on Knowles, things are brightening for his family undertaker — popsure!"

Rosalie and Thayer were in the "small drawingroom," waiting for him.

"And then, as soon as he comes, the revelation!" she had made jubilant announcement to the senator.

Thayer, his whole body aching with weariness, tried to respond to her lightness of mood. He thought he had never seen her so beautiful. There was new splendour in her eyes.

For the second time that day, the maternal part of her love was ascendant. She had been of help to him: she would soon prove that her love could serve him in the practical, material things of life. The thought transfigured her.

All day long telegrams from his constituents, individuals and organizations, had poured into his offices, declaring unshaken confidence in him, prophesying that the attempt to discredit him would result only in his polling a bigger primary vote than they had hitherto thought possible.

"So wonderful!" she breathed, stirred to an ecstasy of admiration. "Such a tribute! Oh, my dear, my dear! No one can hurt you — no one!"

After all, however, she knew as well as he that the end of the affair depended on the facts adduced. They kept that before them all the time. Washington was, to them, by no means a sealed book.

The city, made by politicians, thought and acted like politicians. Deafening in its applause

of greatness and victory, it was likewise swift to desert men under attack. John Thayer's career hung in the balance.

Hastings knew it better even than they did. His work had made him an expert on losing causes and damaged reputations — in Washington. And, shaking hands with this young couple and seeing the quality of their courage, he was drawn to them more than ever.

Rosalie began her "revelation":

"I couldn't sleep last night. The crime itself, the gathering of the crowd, the carrying of Zimony to the hospital, all of it excited me. When daybreak came, I got up. My idea was to go for a long walk.

"But I changed my mind. I heard Zimony mention the serf-like devotion of the night elevator-boy to her. I thought I'd drop in at the Melwood and see what had developed. The boy, Harry, knowing I was a friend of Zimony's, talked frankly enough, but he had no news. After a while, in a way that struck me as curious, he said he wished somebody who was her friend would look at the apartment before it had been worse upset by the police.

"He had a key which Zimony had given him, so that he could accept and put away her parcels. I found things practically as the newspapers

have described them, except for a few additional details which —"

"Let me interrupt a moment, please, Miss Conrad," Hastings put in, "just to show I'm not stone-blind. You found Miss Newman's emery bag on the floor near the phonograph, the emery sewed into a ribbon sling. Isn't that true?"

"Yes; she had arranged the emery as an ornament as well as a necessity."

"I deserve a medal," he approved himself, beaming, his eyes all admiration as he squinted at her, over the spectacle rims. "But," he prompted, "you found something else, something that enabled you to do what I couldn't do, explain the use made of the emery and its ribbon sling."

"I did, Mr. Hastings.—The minute hand of the grandfather clock in the passage had been marked very recently, showed a tiny scratch. I couldn't have seen it without the boy's pocket torch. Even then, any connection between the emery sling and the clock never occurred to me. In fact, I didn't see anything worth while — at the time.

"When I left, I asked Harry to save for me anything the charwoman might sweep up in her work on the third floor.

"On his way home at half-past seven, he left

an envelope in our letter-box at the door. In the envelope was some green thread, embroidery floss—silk, you'd describe it—five or six yards. It had been swept up with other trash.

"I'd seen a little bit of this silk attached to the emery sling. Here's the thread the charwoman found."

She spread out the fingers of her left hand. On her palm lay a small, flat bunch of green silk thread.

"Come with me!" she said, her eyes glowing.

They followed her into Felix Conrad's study, Thayer observing at once that a phonograph like Miss Newman's had been brought in since his visit a few hours ago.

"Gentlemen, be seated!" Rosalie, in a riot of high spirits, mimicked the minstrel "Mr. Bones."

"It is now," she said, looking at the grandfather clock, "five-fifty-eight. Watch closely. Here's another piece of green thread, six yards of it, exactly like that the charwoman found, and again exactly like the fragment I found attached to the emery sling. Do you see?"

"Yes, but not with understanding," confessed the detective.

"In a moment you will. This phonograph, this make of machine, is started by pressure, a

light touch on this lever; and it's stopped by similar pressure on this second lever."

She had the top up, pointing to the two brass levers just inside the casing of the instrument and an inch from the disc. Next she took from a chair a ribbon sling, weighted at the bottom by an emery bag, the whole thing a duplicate of the sling found in Miss Newman's apartment.

Hooking the unweighted top of the sling over the starting lever, she set the weighted bottom loop on the casing of the machine, balancing it so that a slight pull in any direction would dislodge it. To this end she fastened the green thread. The other end of the thread she carried across the room to the grandfather clock, tying it to the minute hand.

"Now," she said, illustrating with action each explanatory phrase, "it's six o'clock. Suppose I move the minute hand forward, this way, watching the effect.

"It's easy to see, from the tightening of the thread at every advance of the minute hand, that at eight minutes past six one of two things is sure to happen: either the minute hand will be retarded and the whole machinery of the clock stopped by the 'pull' of the thread; or the 'pull' of the minute hand will so tighten the thread that the thread will unbalance the heavy loop of the emery sling and make it fall.—That clear?"

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"Great! Fine!" The old man's endorsement was unqualified. "Finer than frog-hair!"

"I'll have mercy on you," she promised, colour heightened. "I won't make you sit there eight minutes, waiting to see what happens. Two minutes will be enough. It's now one minute past six. There!" She stepped back from the clock. "See what you will see at three minutes past six."

The two minutes dragged. At regular, short intervals the silk thread grew perceptibly tighter.

The clock's ticking grew louder, rose above the street noises that came through the open windows. Thayer had a sense of being far from the rest of the world. The tick-tock, tick-tock, was an exasperation — infernally so —

On the three minute mark the long, creeping hand quivered: the thread, drawn tight by the progress of the hand, vibrated visibly: to the listening ear, it seemed that the clock had missed a tick, stopped. Thayer shot Rosalie a quick glance. She was smiling, assured.

He caught the sound of another tick; the clock had not stopped. Before he realized this fact fully, the heavy emery end of the sling toppled from its balanced position and fell, swinging slowly backward and forward in space half-way to the floor.

It did not reach the floor because the other

end, attached to the starting lever, held securely, even after they had heard the click of the lever starting the motor of the instrument. The green thread swung loose; the clock was not stopped.

The needle rasped on the blank border of the ecord as the disc gathered momentum. When the first notes of the record rang out, Rosalie stopped the motor and turned to the detective.

"Of course," she said, "it works every time. It wouldn't prove much if it didn't."

"Tell us how you got at this," he asked her, profoundly interested.

And again, suddenly, she and Thayer saw the change in him — from a good old "hick", to a strong, brilliant thinker.

"I've thought all the time the Knowles person was guilty," she told him. "You see what he did. He's an inventor; has spent his life experimenting with angles, pulling power and things of that kind. He did stab Zimony Newman. He was cold-blooded about it. He thought he'd killed her and he realized at once that, if he couldn't establish an alibi, a time alibi, he was sure to be punished.

"The phonograph gave him his idea. His watch play later in the elevator, with the announcements of the time to Harry Fields, gave him a corroborating witness.

"His preparation made, he carried her - the

body, as he thought—from the bedroom to the alcove; presumably for the purpose of postponing discovery of the crime. This actually happened. Two other men called on her before the tragedy was brought to light. Luck was with him every minute.

"His getting the ice cream—for he would have gone after it, even if Harry Fields had offered to do so—and his 'talking' through the bedroom door: those were items of the alibi, things to be seen and substantiated by Harry.

"Don't you think that's a fair story of his actions, Mr. Hastings?"

"Wonderful!" he said. "Correct — as pretty a piece of work as I ever heard of!"

"And the alibi's gone!" Thayer exulted.

"Gone," agreed the old man. "Great trout! He nearly got away with it—missed it by a whisker!"

Rosalie was laughing through tears. The suspense of this scene, the strain of the whole day, its disappointments and surprises, were exacting the price of a passing weakness. She laughed happily while the big tears formed in her wide, shining eyes and stole their way, one by one, past her lashes.

The old man dragged his hat from its accustomed pocket.

"Robert F. Knowles," he told her, making each of his words new homage, "is about to be arrested, thanks to your brain —" he bowed over her hand —" and your high-hearted courage."

XIV

A SURPRISING DEFENCE

ASTINGS had been dealing with Knowles on a "psychological level;" and Knowles had weakened.

"Inventors, like this fellow," the old man had reflected, "show more temperament than insides. Harass 'em, rasp their nerves, flick 'em on the raw, and you've got 'em! They've developed such imaginations that danger looks like a mountain to 'em, first glance.

"I'm going to scare this guy — turn him inside out."

He had gone, unannounced, to the inventor's room at the Wareham, and for nearly an hour, beaming and benignant, he had played mercilessly on the man's high-strung nervous system. Felix Conrad could not have surpassed him in his use of innuendo, hints and indirection.

Apparently credulous of Knowles' every statement, he had discussed the evidence against Marcello, Gower and Thayer, with curious asides and meaningless references at various times to green silk, a phonograph and clocks.

At first Knowles laughed; the "old country-

man" amused him. But, after the second introduction of silk into a conversation that had nothing whatever to do with silk, the younger man knew that to some extent he was threatened.

He was "rasped" and "harassed" as thoroughly as Hastings could have desired. With his coat off and nursing his left knee between locked hands, he sat on the side of the bed, his eyes furtive as he watched the detective, half-recumbent in the big arm-chair.

In the bathroom water dripped from a faucet and "got on his nerves." He thought he would get up and turn it off, but he made no move. He looked out of the window at the Washington monument bathed in the white silk of light from a dozen searchlights — but why look at that now?

What was this blundering old ass driving at, anyway? — He let fall the knee he had been nursing. As he did so, he pulled up his trousers leg, to see whether the perspiration of his palms had marked it. Satisfied on that, he mopped his hands with a handkerchief, and felt the edge of his collar: it was softening.

Something, nervousness or the heat, was hitting him noticeably. He estimated his inquisitor's physical strength, and followed that with the mental admonition that he must keep himself in hand. Besides, the "rube" knew nothing—nothing whatever!

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Hastings, seeing how disorganized he was, became more direct. The old man put away his knife and wood, brushed splinters from his clothing.

"Inventors — a queer gang," he mused aloud, as if declaring the result of long and patient research: "a queer tribe. No heart, Mr. Knowles, no heart in 'em at all."

"You mean me" Knowles asked, curiously like a boy inviting a fight.

"Why, yes; in a way. If it would bring you the money to 'put over' one of your brilliant ideas, you'd starve a child, or even stab a woman, wouldn't you?"

The detective, saying that, got himself together with remarkable agility, slid to the edge of his chair. The inventor, mouth open for further argument, stood up and stared at him.

"I said, 'stab a woman,'" Hastings pricked him.

"Well, suppose you did — what of it?" Knowles responded.

Hastings' chuckle stung him.

"Sit down, Mr. Knowles. Sit down, and let's talk it over."

"Talk what over?"

"Your guilt — stabbing Miss Newman."

Knowles did not sit down. His face flamed; his neck was suddenly too large for his collar

and bulged over it. He went nearer to the detective, looked at him out of blazing eyes.

"Listen!" he threatened. "If you charge me with that, if you stick to what you've just said, I'll throw you out of this room!"

Hastings smiled, looking up to him over the steel rims of his spectacles. He knew he faced trouble, although he doubted the other's willingness to make it serious. But he repeated, his attitude on the edge of the chair unchanged:

"Your guilt - stabbing Miss -"

He was interrupted by the unexpected. Knowles, with a little outcry like the squeak of a cornered rat, sprang on him, got both hands on his throat, pressing him backward in the big chair, trying to force him to a reclining posture. The inventor's sheer weight was a tremendous advantage, irresistible when reinforced by weakening the old man's strength every second by the choking.

The odds told quickly. The detective was bent backward, was nearly prone against the slanted chair-back. He could see, too, that, as he yielded, his assailant's anger increased. It was impossible to cry for help. His utterance was choked off. Giving way, inch by inch, he knew that here was a matter of life and death.

Not anger, but rage gone berserker, a mania beyond control, had him in its grasp.

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Thought of an alarm, drawing the attention of persons in the hall or other rooms, was ridiculous. There was no noise in this room, no sound save the hissing intake of the inventor's breathing and the low drone of the electric fan. The fellow's strength increased with every inch he gained.

Whatever might have been his motive when he sprang, his desire now was to kill.

The detective saw that clearly, and realized again how close he was to actually losing his life. His amusing little excursion into criminal psychology, his study of the effects of continuous goading and irritating, had brought him to this imminence of death.

Blackness, in battering waves, engulfed him momentarily. His left shoulder gave to the pressure, touched the back of the chair. Flames spurted across his vision. His head felt as if red-hot nails were being hammered into it.

Pain like that was not to be endured. At least, he would not endure it. There was a trick to meet this attack — what was it? His brother used to play it on him when they were boys together, wrestling. It started with the shoulder, and —

His right shoulder was still a good three inches from the chair-back. He relaxed it, took all exertion out of it, so that Knowles thrust it back with surprising ease and, in the unexpected forward movement, lost the controlled poise of his own body. For that fraction of time the assailant, trying to restore and readjust his own balance, was necessarily without effectiveness against his victim.

It was the detective's chance. With the inventor's weight thrown all to the right, and too far to the right, he wriggled to the left and upward, his motion accelerated by the desperate brevity of the time that was favourable to him.

Knowles, busy for the instant in re-bracing his legs, loosened involuntarily the clutch of his hands. Hastings wriggled again to the left and upward. The strength that comes from clean living met his present urgent need. His body was now on a level with that of Knowles.

Both of them rested much of their weight on one side. The inventor leaned on his left elbow, which was thrust against the seat cushion of the chair while he retained the grasp of both hands on the detective's throat. Hastings supported himself on his right elbow, likewise braced against the seat cushion.

Hastings became almost sinuous. Another convulsive twitch of his muscles lifted him a little higher than Knowles.

In that moment he put both his hands on the inventor's fingers. If he could pull them away,

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bend back even one of the fingers! But he could not do it. They were driven so deeply into the loose flesh of his neck that he could get no leverage under their ends. Stars and sparks swept before his eyes.

Knowles tightened his grip. The old man's spine felt as if it, in its turn, had caught fire. That burning of his bones and his flesh—his whole body was one vast conflagration.

But there was a trick against this "choke hold." He reviewed in crazy rapidity many things his brother had taught him: the "curving serve" in tennis and the "jabbing with your elbow" in wrestling — Was that it? No; not that exactly —

He let go of Knowles' fingers. What did they matter, anyway? He put both hands on the fellow's right forearm. His brother's instruction came back. That was it! He knew now! He gave the forearm a snap downward and then upward and backward, driving the bone, some bone of the arm, against the elbow joint. It might break the elbow: anyway it would break the killing hold on his throat.

Why didn't it work? A wave of darkness engulfed him a second time, and the bursting stars whirled through it.— That trick should do the business. No man's elbow could stand that punishment. If it —

It worked! He had a chance to live! He was getting air into his lungs. He moved instinctively, had a grasp now on each of the fellow's forearms. He broke the hold of the left hand.

They were lying side by side, chest to chest, jammed down into the chair, Knowles trying to free his wrists. Hastings drew great, long breaths. At first, the breathing had hurt him, and there had been something tremendous going on in his neck, pounding and thumping, blood racing to places that needed it. But he saw no more stars and sparks.

The inventor stiffened himself, preparatory to springing up and away from him. Hastings did not resist that; he could do as much with an upright position as the other man could. They struggled up together, got on their feet, confronted each other, Knowles squirming and twisting to free his wrists.

Hastings held them with an ease that made the other's fury flame higher.

"Why don't you quit?" the detective asked him finally. "I can tell you—"

"You'll quit before I'm through with you!"
Knowles told him. "I haven't started yet."

On the end of that, Knowles, balancing himself on his toes, threw all his weight against Hastings, to press him backward to the wall or mash him down if he persisted in keeping the wrist-hold. The detective gave a step or two backward, enough to wear out the weight of the impact, and kept the hold.

Knowles was the recipient of another arm twist. He thought a bone was broken; but he did not give in. Hastings increased the pressure. Knowles drew in his lower lip, biting it. When he tried to wrench away, the detective repeated the trick of thrusting the forearm back against the elbow joint.

The effect was agony: the inventor felt as if liquid fire trickled down from his shoulder to his finger-tips. It made his whole arm powerless. Resistance was impossible.

His forehead dripped cold sweat. He could do nothing but suffer. It was no longer a contest. Hastings gave him further attention in both arms — and laughed.

Knowles, feeling in advance what was coming, gave in.

"That's enough," he said in a low tone.

Released instantly, his first impulse was to brush from his lower lip the flecks of blood that showed how he had bitten it; but he could not do it. He could not raise his arms. They were numb.

He stood near the bed, his breathing fast and shallow, his arms dangling at his sides, like ropes.

Hastings was matter-of-fact.

"Sit down, there on the bed," he directed.
"You'll be all right as soon as the blood gets back to your hands."

The inventor obeyed.

"You're too impulsive, Knowles," continued the old man, surveying him from the centre of the room. "That's what I say: no stamina, you inventors. Something strains you, and you fly into a thousand pieces! If you'd beaten me to a pulp, it wouldn't have done you any good. You didn't give me time to say I was your friend. I'm going to help you right now."

Hastings went nearer to him.

"I know how you framed your alibi: the green silk thread tied to the emery bag and the minute hand of the grandfather clock; and the phono—"

He stopped as Knowles rose, mouth open, arms swinging to each move of his body.

"My God!" the accused man whispered.
"Did you — did you — see it?"

His fear was unqualified: there was in all his make-up nothing, mental or physical, strong enough to gloss it. His head was pushed forward, his neck elongated like a duck's as he stared at the detective.

Hastings went back to the chair that had been the scene of their struggle.

"Sit down," he said, and when the other

was seated, added: "So you did it, Knowles."
"Yes."

The detective was analysing a plan he had formed beforehand, renewing now his confidence in it.

Knowles broke the pause again.

"What are you going to do - to me?"

The question out, he gulped, his Adam's-apple moving like a piston.

"Arrest me?" he persisted.

For the first time Hastings saw craftiness in the fellow's glance.

"What else is there to do?"

"But it was self-defence. She tried to shoot me. She said she could kill me and never be touched for it.—and somebody, a man higher up, would fix things for her."

Hastings visualized the woman, reliant upon herself only and courageous, taunting this coward. He believed Knowles was telling the truth. He could see the yellowness of the scene: the big lump striking out at the woman.

If it could be proved that she was a spy, and if he stuck to the self-defence story, he might escape punishment after all! The situation struck the old man as exceedingly funny.

"If you do as I tell you," he said drily, "I won't arrest you tonight — maybe, not for a long while"

"I'll do anything."

"I thought so. — All right. I'm after bigger game than you. This Gower puzzles me — I mean his interest in Miss! Newman. If you'll play fair with me — well, things will go better for you. Why did you stab her?"

"Self-defence; and she stole my blue-prints; wouldn't give 'em up."

"You do this," Hastings cut him short: "behave as you've been doing all day: free, careless. And keep your mouth shut. If it's found out now that you stabbed her, my other game's gone to pot."

He started out.

"When will I know what's going to be done—about me?" Knowles pleaded. "My work, my career, will—"

"Cut that 'career' stuff! — You'll know within a few days: twenty-four hours, may-be."

The old man slammed the door, was gone—banking much on his knowledge of human nature—certain of Knowles' abject obedience.

He found Riley at the Melwood, back from Baltimore ahead of time. Getting down to business at once, he asked about Miss Newman's wound.

"Downward, slanting from left to right," Riley informed him: "such a wound as would have been made by a right-handed thrust, ninety-nine times out of a hundred."

It was a point no longer valuable.

But they talked on, rapidly, avoiding the superfluous, each recognizing the value of the other's time. The detective's queries became faster and faster. The doctor was rich with information — imparted an astounding fact.

Hastings, amazed as he was, compared the information Riley gave him with what he had learned from Knowles and Rosalie Conrad. Quick action was essential.

Using the doctor's telephone, he called the Conrad house and got Rosalie on the wire.

Was the senator there? Fine! — Leaving? — She must keep him a while longer. Both of them must hear what he had learned — it was imperative — he would be with them in a few minutes.

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CONCERNING A SECOND ATTACK

E found Rosalie and John Thayer in the Conrad study.

"Didn't know I'd bother you again this evening, Miss Conrad," he said, apologetic, without a sign of the haste he had made to reach her.

"But I have to — after I get that stuff we found in the lumber-room. I won't be a minute."

Rosalie handed him the lumber-room key.

"And the revolver on Gower's shelf," he added.

"I've changed my mind — believe I'd like to have it."

Thayer offered to get it.

"Thanks," he accepted, his gait a dog-trot as he hurried out.

He came back with the sheet of steel and the wire screen wrapped in newspapers, under his right arm; the box of sand, similarly wrapped, under the left. He carried, in all, approximately sixty pounds—handling it as if it had been as many ounces.

The senator gave him Gower's revolver.

"Thanks. I feel better with these toys in my possession."

"After all, then," Thayer reminded him of their conversation earlier in the day, "they are clues?"

"Or hints," he smiled; "at least, hints."

Thayer asked about Knowles: "Did you arrest him?"

"No. But I found him — get him later." Seeing their astonishment, he transferred his interest to Rosalie.

"Will you trust me, about Knowles, a little while — just a very little while?"

"For months, Mr. Hastings," she said warmly.
"That's good! Just now, unarrested, he can

help me in another matter."

He was silent a long moment.

"I tell you, Miss Conrad," he said finally, "I want to ask you about a few things. Later, if you didn't know me as your friend, and son's—the senator's—friend here, you might be tempted to think I'd treated you unfairly. But that isn't true. You'll remember that, won't you?"

"Why, of course!"

He faced her across the desk, his clasped hands behind him, moving the tail of his coat up and down like the flapping of a bird's wing.

"First of all, I've been wondering where your father is."

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- "He went to the police station, to see Mr. Gower.
 - "At this time of night?"
- "He went some time ago; wouldn't wait for dinner. He said he could get a permit to see Gower."

The old man looked puzzled.

- "Ought to be back by this time, oughtn't he?"
- "No; he's down for a speech this evening—meeting of some patriotic club, I think."
- "I see.— Now, then," he spoke as if he forced himself with difficulty to the words: "anybody in this house interested in firearms?"
- "Yes. At one time Mr. Gower was a crack revolver shot. Three or four years ago, he won a medal in a big contest."
 - "And now?"
- "He's given up shooting; morphine injured his sight."
 - "Anybody else?"
- "Father, of course," she replied. "Revolver shooting was one of his fads like art, or music; or spies, now. But he also lost interest in it."
 - "Was he a good shot?"
 - "Unusually so, I believe."

Hastings resumed his pacing. It was a long time before he spoke again.

Thaver turned to Rosalie. The detective's

warning before questioning her had impressed him as deeply as it had her. He wanted to avoid even the appearance of secretiveness.

"You've forgotten one thing, Rosalie. The air-rifle you —"

"Why, yes," she accepted the prompting. "Only a short time ago, Mr. Hastings, two or three months, I should say, I saw father examining a queer-looking gun, in his study. I remember I asked him if he'd gone back to his old toys."

"What did he say?"

"He said no: Gower had brought it to him for examination: an inventor wanted father to finance the manufacture and sale of it."

"Did he say he would do that?"

"I don't think so. I think I got the idea he wouldn't."

Hastings was far from satisfaction. He clung to detail.

"And Gower — you say he does no more shooting?"

" No more."

The detective turned that over in his mind.

"Yes; I see. I've something to tell you, but I want you to get it at the right angle."

He was facing her across the desk again, hands deep in his pockets, chin against his chest.

"Wonder," he speculated, "wonder if you

can make the senator keep a secret - for a while?"

Thayer, leaving his chair, stood beside Rosalie: he felt that the old man's statement would reveal something totally unexpected. Hastings came closer to the desk and leaned both hands on it, the movement putting his face outside the glare of the reading light.

"Up to the point of Knowles's carrying Miss Newman from the bedroom to the alcove, your story of the phonograph scene is correct, Miss Conrad. I'm sure of that."

His shadowed face was grim.

"But, I think, there was another act in the tragedy. Knowles did not carry her immediately from the bed to the alcove. Before he did that, he had a struggle with her, and hurt her, attacked her again. If he didn't, somebody else did."

Thayer saw where the theorizing led.

"What convinces you of the struggle, a second attack?"

"For one thing, the bloodstains on the floor and on the rugs in the living room. If Knowles had carried her from the bed to the alcove immediately after he stabbed her, the trail of blood would have been more or less straight, one continuous line. The chief of police is acting on the supposition that this was so. In fact, however, as shown by careful examination, the bloodstains are a figure eight, two loops.

"Miss Newman, wounded, was all over the living room, blindly reeling and stumbling, or consciously going from the bedroom to the mantel in the living room, thence to the bedroom door again, and from there to the mantel once more. Knowles would never have carried her in such directions!

"Now, what does all that mean? She was supposed to have stolen Knowles' blue-prints. He thought she had them there. As a matter of fact, wasn't that true?—and didn't she put up a fight to keep her hands on them? Didn't she, hurt and bleeding as she was, have this struggle with him until he gave her the second wound?"

"You still talk about a 'second wound'," Thayer said. "How do you know there was a second?"

"Dr. Riley," Hastings replied, giving them time to consider the new story. "I've just seen him. He told me."

"That there was a second attack?"

"Yes."

"But I can't understand. You mean she received other wounds?"

"That's it — the stab wound, the wound just above her heart, amounts to very little com-

paratively — isn't dangerous. The thing that threatens her life is a bullet."

"You mean she was shot!"

The cry came from Rosalie.

The senator voiced its sequel: "What with?"

"So far as they can tell at present, with a revolver. They've X-rayed that part of her head, the brain."

"The brain?" Rosalie echoed his last two words in a whisper.

To her, they meant Zimony Newman's death, the impossibility of recovery.

"Yes," the old man said gently: "the bullet's imbedded in the skull, hemorrhage threatening."

"But the surgeons!" Thayer interposed. "They can do something! They can't mean they'll sit at her bedside, wondering when she'll die, making no attempt to save her!"

"Probing for the bullet," Hastings explained, "is the only thing that can save her life. And to probe now, they say, would be fatal. Tomorrow, or later—any time within the next four or five days—they will operate."

Thayer put his hand on Rosalie's shoulder. The old man leaned on the desk, looking over and beyond them into space.

He was glad that the thought now in his mind was not one he felt compelled to give them: that

Felix Conrad, determined to help Gower out of trouble, had suggested to the flattered Ross the advantage of keeping as many details as possible to himself — making it sure that the chief of police, not an operative of the Department of Justice, would have the prestige of solving the problem. That was a point to be investigated later.

"Knowles stabbed her," he said musingly, "and later shot her—or he stabbed her, and later somebody else shot her."

Comment came first from Thayer:

- "Gower."
- "You mean Gower shot her?" queried Hastings.
 - "Yes."
- "It may be. I wish I knew Knowles or Gower, or who?"
- "How about the range?" pursued Thayer. "Shot fired inside the apartment, or from a window outside?"
- "Nobody can tell now depends on distance, calibre of revolver and so on."
- "I'd like to know that," Thayer went further: "possibility of from a window over here?"

Rosalie leaned forward, nearer the desk light, her features thrown into strong relief. They saw, all at once, how drawn her face was. Under her eyes there were small, blue shadows, and in the eyes themselves a frank melancholv.

Her brain was a riot of terror. Ever since Hastings had told them of the bullet wound, fear for Zimony's life and scorn for Ross' lie had confused her. Now, even, she was not thinking with clarity. Her self-control was mobbed by the thoughts which rose against her.

She had wished all day to disregard the probability that Gower was involved in the tragedy and relying upon her father to save him. she gave up now.

Her father, Felix Conrad, suspected, or knew, that he had within his home a criminal, and tried to conceal the fact so as to keep his own reputation beyond question!

For the sake of his vanity, he degraded himself!

But that was not the whole of her perplexity. She had in her possession -- certainly without the knowledge of anybody but John Thayer - a piece of evidence which might end all her doubts. and all the doubts of others. What must she do about that - the note she had taken from Mary Fontaine's table?

Her father had played his last card in the game to prevent announcement of her engagement. If he produced facts to injure the senator's name or defence, she was to withhold the announcement. She knew her father better now than ever.

Only in the hope of hurting her fiancé would he have spent a minute calling on Mary and getting from her a communication—and she, his daughter, had seen how bitter was his disappointment on discovering that the letter had been snatched from him when he had it almost in his hand.

She could no longer deceive herself! She was not afraid that the letter would hurt her father. If there had been a possibility of such a thing, he would have trusted to no chance whatever: his eyes would never have lost sight of it for an instant until he had appropriated it and burned it.

Truth was pounding against her. She feared, but the fear was for her lover!

She felt, as the revelation came to her, that she could stand nothing more.

She put her arms on the blotter, resting her forehead upon them. A little outcry came from her, the only expression she vouchsafed of a suffering so strange and so poignant that it shrieked within her to be heard.

Thayer tightened his hold upon her shoulder, reminding her of his longing to help her.

Hastings crossed the room to his bundles, slowly assembling and picking them up.

Rosalie lifted her head as he took a step toward the door.

" If a note —"

She checked herself, putting a hand to her mouth. They waited, motionless, keeping the attitudes in which the three words had found them. They, too, had worried about a note.

"I wish I knew—" she began again, and stopped.

Something was the matter with her head! Why should she tell them, anyway? It was a thing she had to dispose of for herself. If their advice could help her, the affair was of no importance. If she said more, no advice on earth could put a stop to the events that might ensue.

Her mood changed. She wanted an opportunity to think. Her father was trying to destroy the man she loved. She must think—and clearly.

"You'd better go," she said. "Oh, I wish you would — both of you! I must have time to see things as they are. I must, really."

"You're quite right, Miss Conrad," Hastings endorsed her words; "excellently right. There's only one thing I must say now, if you don't mind."

[&]quot;What is it?"

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"I want to ask you — and you, son, Senator — to say nothing to anybody tonight about the bullet — that Miss Newman was shot: in fact, if you'll say nothing about it tomorrow until you hear from me?"

They gave him their promise.

"Good!—I've a little trick or two I want to take," he justified the request.

He left the room, shut the door behind him. made no sound.

She stood up, a little dizzy, and swayed toward John. He put his arm around her, drew her close to him. This time she did not weep. Her eyes were dry and bright, but, under his embrace, her breast was a tumult.

For a very little while she let him hold her so. Then, with gentle touches that caressed him, she put him away from her.

She glanced at the clock; it was a few minutes of ten, the hour set for his conference at the Capitol with Brandon and other senators, all of them high in his party's councils—his political life, as well as his personal character, must be saved. Brandon had offered to go home, to cover the state for him in a whirlwind speaking tour: "statements" for the press had to be drafted; advertisements, paid for at so much per line, must be telegraphed to newspapers throughout the state.

"You must go," she said. "You're late."

Her white face, in spite of the brave eyes, held him. But she fought his reluctance to leave; laughed lightly at the idea of her needing his sympathy; caught him by the sleeve and led him to the door.

There, for a moment, she wavered, remembering that at eleven o'clock her father was to endorse or protest the announcement of her engagement. The folly of his purpose amazed her more than ever. She would have the announcement made, no matter what happened!

Nevertheless, she would see her father at eleven: if for no other reason, to discover what he would say in an attempt to discredit John Thayer.

"Don't think I'm unreasonable, John," she said, "but can you come back here from the conference?"

"Why, yes - but it will be late."

"If you could be here at eleven, for just a moment—"

He thought.

"These conferences last for ever and ever," he said. "I'd have less than an hour there.— Important that I be here at eleven?"

"It would mean, to you and to me, great things, perhaps."

"I'll do this, then: I'll excuse myself for a

little while. I'll get here at eleven, and hurry back to the conference."

When he had gone, she climbed the stairs slowly, as if her resolution controlled her body with difficulty. Her desire was to escape, to flee the work ahead of her. She went into her "den," a room into which nobody ever came uninvited.

The note, sealed in its envelope, lay on the desk before her. She sprang up and locked the door. That done, she caught her breath. Why had she locked herself in with the note?

She answered that: it was because she feared the consequences if the information in that envelope were made public. So far, she was in control of such possibilities: she and the note were locked in, hidden from everybody.

The idea came to her that she might burn it. But the temptation was not irresistible. She must read it — and at once.

XVI

MR. CONRAD BY MOONLIGHT

R. HASTINGS, leaving the Conrad house, balanced his heavy bundles under his arms, descended the short flight of steps to the street level, and on the sidewalk encountered Felix Conrad.

" Ah!"

The exclamation, coming from Felix, expressed neither pleasure nor surprise.

"Hello!" retorted Hastings, throwing back his head, peering under his spectacle rims. "I was wondering where I might find you."

"Which," Felix made genial reply, "is no longer a mystery!"

Mr. Conrad was at his best. Throughout the past four hours the world had conspired for his special benefit and delight.

An event as gratifying as this conspiracy, he had decided, aroused and at the same time excused a certain degree of optimism. Possibly—he was not yet quite sure—possibly, it justified the hope that ultimately men of brains would control the world—a world at present dangerously kind to the stupid.

He had called on David Gower in the late afternoon, and had conversed with the prisoner for more than forty minutes. Informed that his secretary's watch was out of repair, he had taken it, lending in its place the one he wore, and remarking:

"In some respects, David, you'll find that a most interesting chronometer. Later, when I'm gone, examine its works—surprising, truly."

His employe's gratitude still haunted his ears. He had come away from the conference feeling that he had done a good thing.

Nor was this the whole of the world's implacable purpose to delight the wealthy clubman. He had delivered an address to the League of Loyal Manufacturers, and, inspired by the occasion, had made the greatest speech of his life.

His impulsiveness, hot and carefully rehearsed; his furious outbursts of loyalty, shaped and reshaped in the quiet of his study, had resulted in an oration as flawless as it was patriotic. And, like Gower's gratitude, the League's applause was music in his ears, even now.

No wonder that Felix Conrad was himself again, adamant under the blows of adverse circumstance, superior to the surprises of accident! Ridicule could not touch him. He had drawn the fangs of venom!

Tolerance sweetened his flow of thought; graciousness softened his heart. Even the prospect of a conversation with this clumsy old man was not altogether distasteful. He was enjoying, in advance, the satisfaction that comes to the man of intellect while reducing an opponent's logic to asininity.

"Fact is," Hastings went at once to the point, "I'd like to have a talk with you right away."

Mr. Conrad inclined his head in polite agreement. But, looking toward his own door, he recoiled from the hospitable idea that had occurred to him. The detective saw the point: Mr. Conrad preferred that his home be polluted no further by another visit from the old man.

"Ah, yes; to be sure," Felix said urbanely. "I was on the point of extending my walk. Suppose we walk?"

"Suits me," Hastings said. "To La Fayette Park?"

"You read my mind, positively!" Conrad was the apotheosis of cordiality. "The great outdoors, the pleasant breath of flowers, the canopy of stars — what better surroundings could a thinking man desire?"

"All right. But I can't walk and talk simultaneously — an old failing of mine."

They crossed Eighteenth Street and started

eastward on I Street, disappearing in the black pools of shadows made by the trees, reappearing on the white fields made by the moon.

They were silent, Hastings determined to talk only when they had reached a park bench. Occasionally, Felix swung his cane slowly, the metal ferule hanging upon the air a wide and gleaming circle.

Serenity sat upon his brow. Placidity and complacence were at his side.

Secretly derisive, however, he watched Hastings covertly, and saw something that emphasized the advisability of being on his guard. He remembered the detective's monosyllabic bearing that morning in the Newman apartment, followed by quick domination of the scene.— Well, it was one's duty to be always on one's guard—even against an ass!

They went down Connecticut Avenue and into the park. Hastings pointed to a bench in the full glare of the moon. As they took their seats, he put down his bundles, leaning them against the bench on the side further from his companion.

In spite of his handling them without effort, Conrad saw that they were heavy. He wanted to ask what they were, where he had got them. But he kept his curiosity within bounds.

"I thought, Mr. Conrad," Hastings began, "or, more frankly, I hoped you and I could go

over certain matters in a way to benefit you as well as myself."

"You read me, Mr. Hastings, as if I were monosyllables to your scrutiny: a parchment done in large type for your perusal!"

Felix was exuberant. Undoubtedly, he congratulated himself on his ability to chime harmonious response to the other's views!

The detective was not so enraptured.

"It's about Gower," he said.

He paused at that, sighting down the line of his nose and under his glasses, determined to get all he could from a countenance equally determined that he should get nothing.

"Gower?" Felix used the name slowly.

"Yes; Gower."

"I'm afraid you'll have to explain, Mr. Hastings — I honestly am."

By voice and facial expression, Mr. Conrad reprehended himself, confessing the paucity of his brain's resources. He sighed, and thrust his cane into the gravel walk.

"I mean," said the detective, "I'd like to know why you persist in acting as Gower's protector."

"Protector? — Protecting him from what?"

Again Felix regretted his denseness. This was quite clear — his regret. He became a commission of sanity, investigating sadly the remnants of his own intelligence.

"I don't see. I can't —"

He sighed.

The detective, missing none of this fine performance, kept his solemnity intact. He proposed to bring things to an issue:

"I mean, Mr. Conrad, why you give neither me nor any of the other people investigating this crime the benefit of your knowledge."

"My dear sir!" exclaimed Felix, protesting the rank injustice. "My knowledge, scant as it is and useless, is always at your service—always, my dear sir."

"Then, why stand between Gower and the authorities?"

Felix was distressed again. He repaired to some figurative hillside, bleak and brambled, and there draped his soul with the sackcloth of shame.

"David Gower," he said, "my confidential employé, identified Thayer as the assailant of Miss Newman —"

He looked at Gower's watch, explaining:

"I have an appointment for eleven o'clock; but we've ample time to conclude this—er—conversation.— A painful affair—Thayer brings a counter-charge to cripple and injure Gower. Naturally, I feel it my duty to befriend a faithful employé, one who has shown me a superb devotion."

Mr. Hastings was unimpressed.

"Your duty to befriend him, even when he's attempted murder?" he inquired drily.

"Murder! Now, my friend," Felix laughed lightly, barely enough to destroy the fragile idea, as one blows a feather through an open window, away and out of sight; "now, my friend, you brave the breakers of the impossible!"

"Tomorrow morning," Hastings announced, his peering glance sharper than ever, "I'm going to charge him formally with the attempted murder of the Newman girl."

Conrad, leaning closer, examined the detective's face, and exclaimed, marvelling at his discovery:

"Why, my dear fellow — you're in earnest!"

"I am. And, when I take that action, the public will want to know why you stick to him so."

"The word 'stick'—it's so essentially vulgar!" The dandy's fastidiousness was smirched. "Sounds like a mustard plaster!—It takes a long arm, Mr. Hastings, to reach over some sixty yards and stab a woman. You forget the statements of two of the servants that Gower was in his room at the time the crime was committed."

"You refer, I take it, to the stabbing."

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"Why, yes." This time Conrad's bewilderment was unassumed.

"The stabbing," Hastings announced, "isn't now in the reckoning. It is, I'm safe in saying, a minor matter."

Mr. Conrad left off playing with gravel and walking stick.

"What," he countered, his voice flat, "has diminished it so?"

"A bullet."

"A bullet!"

He echoed the old man's words in an astonishment he did not try to hide. He leaned forward again and studied his informant's face.

But the detective gave him no time for mental readjustment. The Conrad countenance was thrust forward, unshadowed by his hat-brim, its smallest peculiarity standing out boldly in the moonlight, its every detail exposed to studious eyes.

Here was the ideal moment for Hastings' statement:

"She was shot."

"Shot!"

It was evident how Felix groped for clarity.

"Shot!" He repeated his first echo, and sat erect—forgetting himself only so far that he pushed his hat further to the back of his head and remained, as to his face, lighted up and

self-revealing to the old man's gaze. "Shot—and who's the surgeon?"

"Riley."

"And how's she lasting?"

He realized then that he was too curious. His face went back to its immobility.

"She's lasting all right," the detective answered him. "She may get well. It's an even chance."

"But the police, you, nobody mentioned this! Gower didn't mention it — nobody."

"That's true."

"Queer, isn't it? Things may come up, facts to change one's mind."

He was himself again, inscrutable; his body a cabinet of mystery, hiding all the things that went on inside of it, the little ideas, the big thoughts.

"That was what I thought," Hastings said; "you might change your mind."

"So?" He deliberated. "No; not about Gower. He's innocent."

"If you know that, and can prove it," the detective said grimly, "you'll do your faithful employé a great service — probably save his life."

"Oh," Felix ignored the prophesied danger; by the way, the bullet — did it show anything?"

"Show what?"

- "Show anything: the calibre of the revolver or —"
- "What," Hastings cut in, "makes you say it was a revolver?"
- "It could hardly have been done with a machine gun or a trench mortar."

The irony was excellent.

"No, it hasn't shown much of anything," Hastings answered him.

" Ah-h!"

The exclamation was the voice of boredom. But the old man caught its significance, knew that, in asking about the bullet, Conrad had voiced his chief concern, and that this concern had been great.

- "Who," Felix put another inquiry, "did you say was the surgeon in charge?"
 - "Riley, of course. It's his case."
- "Quite so quite. I thought, a mere speculation on my part, he might have called in an older man, one more expert in er probing."

The detective bent over and picked up the sand box in its wrapping of newspaper.

"Mr. Conrad," he said, balancing the box on his knees, "in my accusation tomorrow I'm going to say that Zimony Newman lies at death's door as a result of having been shot by a man who, when he fired the bullet that struck her down, stood at a window of the third-floor front room of your residence."

" Yes?"

Pronunciation of the monosyllable wearied Mr. Conrad. He yawned a little.

"And that the man who tried to murder her is David Gower."

"Yes. I think you told me that, or something like that, a few minutes ago."

Mr. Conrad's weariness increased. Boredom oppressed him.

"And that bullet contained extraordinary evidence."

There was a rift in the boredom.

"Evidence — extraordinary?"

"Exactly."

"Ah-h, I see. That's interesting. And the bullet, Mr. Hastings: who probed for it?"

"Nobody. It's still in her head—or her brain: mixed up some way in what Riley says is the dura mater or pia mater—you know, of course—glands protecting the brain."

Felix looked at him steadily, a long time. Hastings met the look.

The time had come for decision: the employer could still champion the employé and have himself smirched in doing it, or desert the faithful secretary and advantage himself by producing facts to make the secretary's conviction sure. Hastings saw how earnestly Conrad pondered the thing.

"Of course, too," the detective prodded with repetition, "there's another thing: what will the bullet show when we have it in our hands?"

The effect of that pronouncement was surprising. Conrad, looking into space, giving voice to soliloquy instead of addressing him, said:

"Shot! — Nine twenty-six to nine thirty-four."

Except that the figures described the time Knowles consumed in getting the ice-cream for Miss Newman, Hastings could make nothing of the half-muttered phrases. He made no special effort to translate them just then. He was busy watching the Conrad countenance.

The face, trained to impassivity in time of agitation, was in revolt at last. An emotion, stronger than all the others Felix had taught himself to hide, was in command.

The mask was disappearing, piece by piece, as if an unseen agent worked on it with hammer and chisel, chipping off, chipping off, with heavy blows. But, with that, was a worse, a noisome, impression: something like dissolution and rottenness, as a sheet of wet blotting-paper, soppy, is picked up in small bits from the smooth table to which it clings.

For once, the Conrad countenance was not a flippant advertisement of fallacies. In that moment any man who looked at him could see what was in his heart. He was afraid.

"Shot! — Nine twenty-six — to nine thirty-four."

Repeating the meaningless words, he looked away from the detective.

"Well!" Hastings sought to jog him into argument. "What about this devoted employé, this Gower?"

"You're sure he shot the woman?"

"Absolutely."

Felix turned to him again. Hastings perceived that already the mask had been recovered, was now almost readjusted. The mouth, a few seconds ago a pair of loose, tremulous lips, was now a thin, straight line; the eyes, which had been wide and staring without purpose, were hard, direct in their gaze.

"If Gower did that!" he said, not like a man hotly and thoughtlessly enraged, but with a cold, intense venom. "If he hurt that woman, if he fired at her, he'll suffer the tortures —"

He checked himself, laughing in an impersonal, mirthless tone.

"I'm tempted to be theatric," he apologized.

"Let's be practical, Mr. Conrad," Hastings

suggested. "If your secretary's guilty, you want him punished?"

- "Most assuredly on evidence. You have that: enough?"
 - "More than enough."
 - "What?"
- "Your secretary, as I understand it," the detective began, "was at one time a crack revolver shot. Lately he's given up the sport poor nerves and worse eyes, results of morphinism. That true?"
 - " Practically."
 - "What do you mean by that, 'practically'?"
 - "I should have said 'entirely.'"
- "And, I'm informed, he's no longer interested in shooting — revolvers, rifles, clay pigeons, none of that appeals to him?"
 - "That's true."

Hastings, his shoulders stooped to a perfect bow, forgetful of the heavy parcel on his knee, looked up quickly.

- "And yet, right now, he is, if you want the truth of it, a crack shot."
 - "Really?"
- "And he's proud of it," Hastings continued; "knows its importance, its value. See here." He took the newspaper wrappings from the box on his knee. "A suggestion: this box of sand, its one open side covered with heavy linen, was in

the third floor room of your house. Previous to that, Gower had up there a steel plate an eighth of an inch thick, two feet wide and three feet long, weighing thirty-eight pounds. I've got it right here. You, of course, in your acquaintance with fire-arms and their use, know—"

"Certainly," Felix obviated a long statement; "the sand box and the steel plate are 'bullet catchers'; used in shooting galleries to prevent bullets going through the rear wall."

He gave undivided attention to the case against Gower. He wanted all of it.

Hastings pursued:

"Gower's used these bullet-catchers in daily practice. He had a good range, the depth of the front room and the length of the hall extending to the back of the house — your house."

"How do you know that, Mr. Hastings?" Felix, in putting the question, sounded querulous.

"If you'll excuse me — I proceed: his opportunity for practice was fine: nobody but himself and Whipple on that floor; a silencer on his gun. The whole thing was easy.

"But he took no chances of failure in the shooting he intended to do. Wire screens are always a puzzle when it comes to a question of ballistics. Sometimes they deflect a bullet; sometimes they stop its course altogether; some-

times the bullet gets through and falls to the floor, spent, three or four inches from the screen it has penetrated.

"Your secretary knew all that, and experimented with a screen—shot into it, and through it—a screen which he took from the window on the Eighteenth Street side of your third-floor front room—here it is, in this other bundle.

"So much powder needed to carry a bullet this many yards and through a window screen and into the body of a human being: the calculations are simple: so much powder for thirty yards; therefore, just so much more powder for fifty, or ninety, or a hundred yards. He knew what he was about.

"There you have it: the one-time champion revolver shot again at top form by daily practice; everybody thinking he can't see a flock of geese; and he certain, through precise experiments, exactly how much powder and what bullet will do his work."

The detective paused and squinted down his nose, inviting comment. Felix made none.

"Well, what do you think of it?" Hastings demanded.

Conrad smiled, brilliantly.

"Tremendously interesting, absorbing; but a little overrated, I'm afraid. Expecting the facts

you've just given me to substantiate a charge of deadly assault — it's — why, it's like converting a silk-worm into a ball gown."

"Still," Hastings continued slowly, "we might as well consider the fellow's motive. Back of his criminal plan, there may have been the jealous man's blind rage, desire to kill what he could not conquer."

"A motive I should never have imputed to Gower," Conrad said lightly.

"Or," Hastings approached the end of his story, "being a German agent under the protection of your reputation and your roof, a spy safe in the employ of a man who, above all others, hated the breed, he did his work cautiously.—Ever hear of communication bullets, Mr. Conrad?"

"Oh, yes."

"I mean bullets hollowed a little, carrying written stuff, fired from a safe place to another safe place for collection by a confederate — ever hear of that sort of thing?"

"Of course.—But you were going to say?"

"I was going to say that I expect to charge Gower with treason as well as with the shooting."

[&]quot;Treason!"

[&]quot; Yes."

[&]quot;Allow me," Felix argued smoothly. "Your

logic fails there. If he had agreed at some previous time to operate with communicating bullets, necessarily he would have been an expert shot then, and ever since; and would have needed no such practice.—And there's his vision; he can't see—eyes gone to pot.—Your theory's wild."

"Take it or leave it," Hastings said doggedly; "it's the case I'll try to prove. If this bullet turns out to be a communication bullet, your secretary will soon have his last dealings with lead."

"But consider," Felix interposed again: "a bullet, piercing objects you've described, will probably be nothing but a shapeless lump when extracted. How could you identify it as one for communication?"

"If we can't, Gower's act remains simply a cold-blooded attempt to murder.

"That, sir," the old man concluded, stern and menacing, "is the case against this precious personage, your secretary, thief and forger; and, I'm ready to make oath, a German spy. That's it—and you can fight me, fight the authorities—to help him, if you choose! But, in choosing, remember the reputation you prize so highly—and what will become of it."

The detective got to his feet, reached for his

bundles. He was willing to wait until the next day for developments. They came, however, at once, with a rush.

For the second time during the interview Felix was angry, now more intensely than before. He, too, stood up. He was suddenly like a rope drawn taut and quivering in multiple tremors under a blow.

His nostrils thickened; his upper lip was drawn away from the lower, exposing long teeth.

Profanity poured from his mouth, and abuse of Gower. His wrath, unrestrained and rampant, caught him up and shook him to and fro.

He broke his cane and threw the pieces away.

He revelled in rage: his facial contortions, his spasmodic movements, the tremor of his body, the insensate phrases that foamed past his clenched teeth, all his speech and motion leaped the barriers of common sense, changed him into something repulsive, a man stripped of all the social reticences.

He achieved unbelievable depths, degrees of looseness and blasphemy that were terrible.

"A spy! And under my protection — with access to my correspondence, all my papers! — And I've befriended him while he put the finishing and decorative touches on the asininity to which he'd reduced me!

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"Drug-fiend, ingrate!" He interlarded the epithets with oaths. "I called on him in his cell.—He's betrayed me!"

He emitted an unintelligible sound.

"Laugh at me!" he stormed to the unresponsive Hastings. "Help him? Stand by him! I'll see him in — What do you want to know? Let me help get him — turn him inside out!"

He moved away, unsteady on his feet, maledictions crowding his mouth. Once he looked back, calling to Hastings:

"See me tomorrow! I'll fill you up with Gower."

He left the park, walking fast, his ungoverned steps making little detours and arcs off the straight line of the path.

Hastings, watching his departure, showed no elation at having him as ally.

"If I'm not right—if Knowles did shoot her," he muttered, sincerely reverent, "God forgive me for what I've put into that man's head tonight."

XVII

ROSALIE PROPOSES A TEST

ONRAD and Thayer were in the study when Rosalie entered. She stopped in the doorway, looking at Thayer.

"Father's told you?"

"About his hesitating to announce our engagement? Yes."

Heavy shadows were under her eyes. He knew at once that she had been through unusual trial.

"We came in together," Conrad said, "and I thought my telling him would save — be easier."

Felix was ingratiating. As she crossed the room, her bearing was plainly that of a woman resolved to do a painful thing; but he missed it entirely, absorbed in observing that the beauty of her dress became, as she moved, gorgeous.

The whiteness of her stood out brilliantly, filling his gaze.

"That was good of you," she acknowledged his information, without warmth.

Thayer took a chair at her left. She turned, to face him directly.

"First, John, what I have to say concerns my 217

father. Afterwards, you and I, alone, will say —"

Without finishing that sentence, she confronted Conrad again:

"I've cancelled the announcements of my engagement to John, father."

Aware that Thayer had sprung to his feet, she put out her left hand, a gesture begging him for quiet: But she kept her eyes on her father. His face indicated merely a polite curiosity.

" Yes?"

He smiled. Something—a new idea, an unexpected development—had destroyed the anger Hastings had seen in La Fayette Park fifteen minutes ago.

"Yes," she said. "I did that because my love for John, even in its most selfish moments, could not put upon him the burden of being connected in any way with Felix Conrad's daughter."

As her beauty had filled the room at first, her agony pervaded now all their thoughts, her father's even.

"What do you mean, Rosalie?"

Conrad watched her, his smile gone.

"I mean," she said, looking always at Felix, and lifting her chin a little, as if through pride she could endure anything without tears; "I mean I release John from our engagement."

"What possible—" Thayer, beginning the question, was stopped by her father.

"Don't talk nonsense," he said sharply. "A few hours ago you made a scene when I suggested the postponement of this announcement. What's happened, to change your mind?"

"This afternoon," she said, "Mary Fontaine tried to deliver to you secretly a letter. You had gone to her to get it. But you didn't get the letter. I got it."

Although she paused, her look a question, he made no comment.

"If," she pursued, "you will let me read that letter to you and John, breaking the engagement may not be — necessary."

Felix was unruffled, thinking with a concentrated swiftness that left no room for empty phrases.

- "Is this letter addressed to me?" he inquired.
- " No."
- "Did anybody tell you it was intended for me?"
 - "Only your face and Mary's."

He smiled, seemed tolerant.

- "Have you read it?"
- " No."

The low-pitched monosyllable conveyed no idea of what she had suffered during the past

hour, when, unable to secure the consent of her conscience to the reading of a stolen note, she had analysed all the facts at her disposal and, from them, had framed the heavy verdict against her father.

He lit a cigarette — and thought. He did not believe her. Of course, she had read it. That was what he would have done. And, since she had read it, she knew it would hit him!

"No," he said firmly. "It isn't my letter. And I don't propose to have you, or Mrs. Fontaine, or anybody else, create the impression that it's mine."

"Oh, father!" she breathed, leaning toward him, trying in vain to find in his face some sign of his desire to have fair, open dealing with her.

"You see! I knew — I knew you wouldn't." She rose slowly, superb in disdain.

"We've come at last, this evening, father, to the end of our ways. All my life you've posed and postured as an inscrutable being with the magic recipe for success and happiness in life. And I believed you!—

"But I know you, now.— At heart you're drawn to evil. You're fascinated by cruelty—

"Oh, I shan't prolong this! Only a word or two more. In every way that fathers and daughters love each other, in all the sweet relationships by which they beautify life—in those things, there never has been any sympathy between you and me: indeed, there could never be. And—it seems—it is a shame to pretend them."

He tried to interrupt; but she stopped him with a motion of her hand.

"I think that's all," she said; "I suppose the word 'disown' is what I mean, although in a way it's worse and more than 'disown.'— Yes; in the sense of ever, so long as I live, expecting from you anything that has to do with affection, and love, and warm, dear happiness, I disown you. And my saying so pains you less than my mere thinking about it pained me!"

She went a step or two toward the door, so that her shoulder was presented to him. She did not see the pattern of his countenance before he said:

"I assume that you apply this fiddle-faddle with equal contempt and scorn to your use of my bank account?"

Looking over her shoulder, she said slowly:

"I had thought you, even you, would have left that unsaid."

He misunderstood her.

"Yes? — I'm to submit to abuse and slander, but smile while I honour your checks?"

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She was able to answer even that:

"No. For months I've been earning more than enough for my support."

She put her hand lightly on Thayer's arm.

"Come with me, John."

She stopped long enough to say to Conrad:

"I would leave your house tonight but for the injury it might do to others—innocent others—while the Newman case is unsettled. But I shall go—quite soon."

Thayer followed her toward the small drawingroom. He felt that, if he lost now the consolation of her love, he would lose, too, all heart for the fight he had to make.

"I'm not interested in that letter!" he tried to persuade her. "I'm not interested in what your father may, or may not, do or say!"

She did not go to the drawing-room. Fearing his insistence, she stopped at the foot of the stairs.

"Don't withdraw that announcement," he begged, sensing her softened mood. "It will get out, news of it — and hurt us."

She stood on the second step of the stairway, looking down to him, the balustrade between them.

"My father," she said, "is such a man as may ruin you tomorrow; and Mary Fontaine — she's wrong — somehow!"

ROSALIE PROPOSES A TEST

- "But that, all of that everything! What does it matter?"
- "I can't have you vulnerable through me, through Felix Conrad's daughter."
- "Felix Conrad's daughter," he said fiercely, "is my salvation!"

She put both her hands, icy cold, on his resting on the balustrade.

"You will say," she continued, "I'm breaking your heart. My dear, you are about to say it now. But it isn't true. Hearts don't break, my love." She looked at him a long moment. "If they did, mine would have broken in this last hour."

He protested again, pointed out that she was over-wrought, magnifying everything.

- "Don't make it too hard for me, John," she implored him, "so hard that I shall fear you distrust my love.
- "We must wait until neither I nor my father can hurt you with the world. We must wait until you are free of worry until it's proved that my father isn't shielding a murderer. I won't have your career hurt by the blot of what your fiancée's father does, or doesn't do."

She saw in his eyes something that almost forced her tears. She sobbed once — a signal to him that, despite her will, she had come to the

place where all her spirit cried out for comforting.

He, seeing that, emphasized with repetition his need of her; said she asked of him now more than should be required of any man.

"I've already said all those things to myself, John," she concluded; "but you must believe me; this is my one great proof of my love: until I send for you, this house is forbidden ground to you."

He was speechless while his amazement turned to anger. That she should do this thing, should turn him from her door, was unfair, intolerable!

"But on one thing," he said finally, with a bitterness that astonished him as much as it hurt her, "we're agreed. You will send for me before I ever again enter this house — your presence."

At that, she turned from him and went, with sure, graceful step, up the wide, shallow stairs, and out of his sight.

The study door opened. Without looking in that direction, he caught up his hat, on his way out. Felix Conrad's low-pitched, colourless voice reached him.

"Just a moment, Thayer. I'd like to clear up this matter."

The senator wheeled and eyed him in flagrant contempt before responding to the call:

"You go to hell!"

He flung open the door and went out, deaf to the laughter with which Conrad began a remonstrance.

Rosalie, back in her "den," was a long time at her desk, staring at the unaddressed, unopened envelope. Conscience forbade, and demanded, that she read the letter it contained. It was her duty to read it. As she was situated now, she had no choice. She knew that; and made a bargain with the obligation: she would read it in the morning. There was nothing to gain by doing so now.

Self-scorn changed to acute consciousness of her weariness. Inertia enveloped her. The day's demands had overwhelmed her.

She went into her bedroom, and, with infinite exertion, undressed. The minute she put her head on the pillows, she fell asleep.

It was still dark when she felt herself struggling back to wakefulness. She did not want to wake up. Above everything else in the world, she wanted rest, the blessed blankness into which she had sunk; but uneasiness would not permit it.

XVIII

ANOTHER WEAPON DISCOVERED

Part OSALIE realized now that she had heard something unusual. A noise, unexpected and threatening, had given the alarm. What was it? Before she could meet it or deal with it effectively, she must remember—She lay still, the silk nightgown her only covering.

The door on her left, leading into the den, was open. On her right another door, leading into her dressing room, was closed. This dressing room she seldom used. It was, for the most part, a storage room for her hats, parasols and some of her handsomer gowns.

The disturbing noise had come from the den. She had waked up with that idea beating against the edges of her consciousness. In fact, she thought now she had heard it twice. She lay for several minutes without moving, hoping for a repetition of the sound.

She held her eyes open, staring straight toward the ceiling. There were moments when she saw nothing but the blackness; in other moments freak flashes of whiteness and zigzags of bright colours were before her.

No sound came to her. Her ears rumbled and were atrophied by turns, in reality catching nothing.

At last, she did hear something, the ticking of the little clock on her desk in the den. That reminded her. She had left the note on the blotter-pad of her desk — the desk open!

That was it, the note! Somebody wanted it, by this time probably had it and was gone.

She sat up. As she did so, a thread of light was flung across the room, vivid, a finger of flame that split the darkness. It was gone before she could reason about it; but she thought it had come from the keyhole on her right: the dressing-room lights had been turned on and off inside of a second.

Or she might have imagined the light. She was bewildered.

In another moment she knew, was informed by a noise in the dressing room. It was not a loud sound. It would never have penetrated to her brain if, in hoping for it, her sense of hearing had not been strained.

Somebody had moved a light chair, one of its legs scraping the strip of bare flooring near the door that gave on the hall. That movement, too. had been for only a fraction of a second checked as soon as started.

She swung her feet to the rug at her bedside,

thrust them into loose slippers, withdrew them, and felt for a pair of moccasins. She would go into the dressing room, herself moving like a ghost, giving the intruder no warning until she switched on the lights, revealing the identity of her, or him — whoever it was.

Drawing tight the ribbons of the moccasins, she slid slowly from the bed and stood upright. As she lifted a kimono, a light, filmy affair, to her shoulders, the fabric of it dragged against the silk nightgown with a scraping that sounded, in the black silence, loud enough to wake every sleeper in the house.

She laid the kimono aside, and considered:

The occupant of the dressing room had entered through the hall door, and naturally had left it open, for noiseless departure. If she were to open the door of her room, she would discover nothing: the intruder, hearing her, would slip through the hall door and away, unidentified.

She started toward the den. At every step the moccasins, soft as they were, met the rugs with audible friction. She learned after three steps how to avoid that: she did it by putting down and lifting each foot with infinite slowness.

Her progress across the den was reassuring: her careful slowness resulted in perfect quiet.

The door from the den into the hall was open, proving the accuracy of her first waking idea

that the alarm had come from there. She made rapid progress along the hall. By keeping the fingers of her left hand in contact with the wall as she advanced, she located the door of the dressing room. It was wide open.

The darkness of the hall had struck her as absolute, but the blackness of the dressing room, she thought, was even more profound. The sense of sight was worthless here. Her ears must do double duty.

And yet, as she realized that somebody was in the dressing room, she knew that the information had come from neither her hearing nor her sight. She "felt" the presence of this other person.

She hesitated, but not because she was afraid. Fear had not occurred to her. She remembered afterwards that she had been altogether absorbed in the mental effort of deciding why the person curious about the Fontaine note would steal hats and gowns.

Starting her first step across the threshold, she perceived that her silk night-gown was again a menace. The thing was audible! Her knees rasped it, as the kimono had done. Upon her eardrums, "sand-papered" by nervousness, the scraping sound fell like clamour.

She stood rigid; then, sure of safety so far, she withdrew her knee, put her foot to the floor, and stood, listening again. She heard somebody's breathing. It was quick, shallow breathing, like that of a corsetted woman in unusual exertion, or like that of a person suffering sharp emotional disturbance.

In an agony of caution, she began the work of gathering up her gown in handfuls and drawing it above her knees. She had intended at first to enter the room undiscovered and to turn on the lights with the push-button a few inches to the left of the door-frame.

But she gave that up. She planned, before facing the intruder, to find out exactly what was this person's real and foremost object.

She stepped forward, this time silently. The slowness, the tensing and relaxing of her legs and body with this creeping carefulness, this attention to each individual and separate muscle, and the strained listening for a noise proclaiming the other's whereabouts — all this was a stupendous physical ordeal.

The breathing she had heard was now inaudible. She went further into the room, not daring to put out her foot with anything like quickness.

She was in a crouching position, holding the gown above her knees with one hand while with the other she described in front of her wide, slow circles, seeking obstacles.

Her hair, done in two long, heavy braids, hung in front of her because of the stooped attitude she had to maintain — and she could bend forward only this certain distance, so as to keep the ends of the braids free of the floor. Like the silk, they also would produce sound.

Four steps within the room she heard again the other's breathing. She located it this time: near the door of the big closet in which hung a great many gowns. Such a collection would tempt a thief.

She heard a click as the knob of the closet door was turned, to open the door. A few seconds later came the second click, the released knob letting the latch spring back.

Rosalie still waited. She would wait until she was sure the intruder had a garment in her hands. That moment came. There was the rasp of finger-nails on satin.

She would see!

There came then the frou-frou of her gown, released and falling from knee to floor as she stood erect, the person with hands on satin scarcely given time to construe the sound; the snap of the electric button driven into the wall under the weight of her clenched hand; and light, torrents of it, blinding, the nerves of her eyes jumping and contracting under the flood of it.

Like herself, the figure partially in the closet made no move during the few seconds necessary for eyes to adjust themselves to the change. She was the first to see.

The intruder was Felix Conrad. She drew back, cowering against the wall, stifling an impulse to switch off the lights — to shut out the picture.

He recognized her in another fraction of a second. When the lights flashed on, he was bending forward, into the closet. The rasping of fingernails against satin had been accidental as he put out his hand in the dark. Springing erect, he faced her, holding in his left hand a gun.

Rosalie recognized it immediately. It was the air-gun she had seen in his study three months ago.

She did not remember how scantily clad she was.

"Father!" she said, a little above her breath, hands to her cheeks, while she cowered against the wall.

" Ah-h!"

As the exclamation passed his lips, he turned and, with sure fingers, using only his right hand, took from its hanger a long opera cloak of crimson satin.

She noticed that he was dressed as she had left him in the study, except that he wore moccasins like hers. "Allow me," he said, in a tone enriched by solicitude.

Before she could grasp his intention, he was at her side, draping the crimson cloak about her, one deft touch drawing it snugly across her shoulders, covering her entirely, from neck to foot. He stepped back and stood leaning on the gun, using it as a cane.

"Why, Rosalie," he regretted, seeing how she trembled, "You're frightened!—I don't see why."

"Don't see why?" she echoed, looking at him out of wide eyes.

"Why, no — really. Startled, yes; I can understand that — but frightened? — No."

She was erect, back to the wall, her left hand a tremulous clasp for her cloak.

"You did it!" she accused.

He comprehended all her meaning, but he put the obvious question, lifted eye-brows pointing his surprise:

"Did what?"

"Shot her."

"All of which shows how astute Gower was."

He jerked the gun upward, balancing it in the hollow of his left arm while he produced cigarette case and matches.

"I mean, in advising me to hide this gun — in fact, to destroy it."

Her eyes remained an accusation.

His glance met hers continuously. When he had lit his cigarette, the smoke hung in front of him, scarcely moving in the still, oppressive air; but the haze of it did not temper the hard keenness of his eyes.

"I see you don't understand," he said. "And an explanation's due Gower, if you're not tired." She nodded, telling him to proceed.

"Gower's a brilliant thinker, analytical. Hastings told me late tonight the Newman woman had been shot. Naturally, I saw what that opened up; the possibility of accusation being brought against Gower, if those already accused chose to stoop so—"

He checked himself, seeing that she resented the last words.

"I mean," he continued, "it might have been said that Gower, or I, or Whipple, anybody in this house, had shot her.— Do I tire you?"

She moved her head in negation.

"I wanted Gower to know of it. Evidently, this shooting information had been withheld for a purpose. To trap Gower — unfairly? Possibly. He was entitled to sufficient time to consider the matter.

"Just a moment more. I sent the information to him, in his cell. The police were kind about it — very.

"His answer was the advice that I conceal this gun, thus preventing its use as evidence to support a false charge.— I thought of this room, this closet, as the one place that would be immune in case of a police search.

"You were, I remembered," he supplemented with a smile, "so friendly with the investigators."

No longer leaning against the wall, she stood straight and without a tremor. She had overcome the agitation of the first few moments following her recognition of him.

"As told you last night," she said, "I don't realize, I can't, that there is anything of importance holding you and me together. You may take this repetition as a warning."

He was thoughtful, blowing smoke to the ceiling.

"Warning?"

In a way which you don't understand it's my duty to hear this repugnant confession of your persistent shielding of a criminal."

"He's innocent, Rosalie - I assure you."

"Still, I don't understand."

In spite of his apparent suavity, she had the impression that Gower had forced him into the business of hiding evidence, and that he resented having to do it.

"By the way, will you repeat this?" he asked,

seeing that she was about to leave the room.

"What?"

"What we've said, what has just happened here."

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"I warned you a minute ago. If it's necessary, I will."

She was uncomfortable, tired.

"That's all, isn't it — all you care to say?"

"Why, no," he objected.

She had reached the hall door, but something in his voice stopped her; it was like pleading.

"If I were you," she gave him cold counsel, "I'd not talk any more."

"I have to. It concerns others."

"I can't stand this heat," she protested further.

He followed her down the hall and into the "den." She took the chair at her desk and switched on the reading lamp, her left elbow on the blotter as she turned to face him.

Under his sharp scrutiny she gave no sign of having seen at once that the note had disappeared. In his turn, he said nothing indicating his possession of it.

She regarded him without interest.

"I appreciate," he said, "your willingness to hear this — now."

"And you remember I advised you not to say it?"

" Yes."

He had taken an arm-chair, his attitude easy and restful, his knees crossed.

"But," he explained, "I have to. Gower's nnocent of any part of the attack upon Zimony Newman. And I'm under great obligation to im. Conditions being as they are, there's nothng I wouldn't do for him. In fact, he could nake of me no request that I would refuse to comply with — that is, so long as it wasn't crimnal. My friendship for him is exactly that deep and sincere."

She moved impatiently.

"You've chosen a strange hour and place," she said scornfully, "for this oration on friendship."

"Still," he persisted, "you can never say I lidn't present you with the key to this so-called nystery of why I befriended Gower and shall continue to befriend him."

"And you," she said with a pathos that surprised him, "because you are as you are, will never know how earnestly -" in her despair of choosing words to express her feeling, she struck the blotter with her clenched hand -"how terribly I wish I could believe you!"

" Ah-h?"

With the slow expletive, he exhaled a great cloud of smoke, and through it looked at her, his lips framed to a smile of cynicism.

She averted her gaze.

When she did that, he laughed lightly. The sound of it was like the sound of a piece of canvas torn by a strong jerk.

"Good night," he said, on the end of the laugh. She remembered the Fontaine note, and stood up.

"There was a note on this blotter," she told him, when he had gone half the distance to the hall, "the note I mentioned — in your study."

" Yes?"

"I heard you in here before you went to my dressing room."

" Yes?"

He saw, she reflected, the difficulty she had encountered in the task of accusing him of the theft. But she went through with it:

"You took the note?"

" Yes."

The unhesitating admission completed her confusion. She gasped, stared at him. He laughed, again with that sickening sound of ripped canvas.

"You said it was mine," he freshened her memory.

She was suddenly overcome by repulsion.

"What was in it?" she demanded, her voice steady only because of her fierce determination.

He made his smile more disagreeable.

"Facts, I believe, that would interest you."

"What?"

He puffed his cigarette-end into brilliant fire before he spoke:

"Allow me."

Taking an envelope from his coat pocket, he approached her, ostensibly for the benefit of the better light from the reading lamp. He drew the heavy, white note-paper from the envelope and spread it open.

She recognized the written characters, sprawly, boldly shaded, too large. They were Zimony Newman's. He gave her the note.

It was in four short lines:

"L. Thayer manageable but

"uninformed. J. gave me

"bits; more, all you need,

"tonight. Appointment."

Her eyes in one glance photographed, for all time, each letter, each punctuation point.

She gave a little cry. Her throat hurt, its muscles contracting stiffly. The note, falling from her limp fingers, would have floated to the floor if Felix had not stooped swiftly, catching it up.

Her knees broke under her. She fell back on the chair at her desk, was aware that her father — or was it John Thayer? — or old Hastings? — somebody with strong, cold hands turned her about so that her arms fell on the blotter-pad, her forehead resting on her arms.

She heard her father's laugh, like the ripping of canvas, as he went out of the room.

Raising her head a little from her arms, she looked through the open window and saw the grey, slow dawn creeping upward, over the sleeping thousands and thousands of people. It was another day!

Her head hurt so; burned! No matter, now— She went into the next room and stood a moment beside her bed. The cloak slipped from her shoulders and bundled itself, a pile of crimson cloth, on the floor at her feet.

She clasped her hands on the back of her neck, and fell across the bed. Consciousness fled, left her with such swiftness that her ears never heard the little moan which forced apart her lips—lips that had imprisoned so long the voices of her agony.

XIX

CONRAD IS HIMSELF AGAIN

ASTINGS, reaching his office early, ran through the stack of newspapers chronicling the developments of yesterday. He saw at once that Ross, by crafty use of the reporters, had created a press opinion close to actual distrust of John Thayer.

Gower and Conrad were the chief's prompters; but that was behind the scenes.

Thayer was in real danger. A reformer, an acknowledged adviser of the White House, the young senator had come to the biggest hour of his career. His future, brilliant and inevitable two days ago, was hair-hung now, tremulous in the wind of rumour.

Hastings lay back in his chair, feet on top of the desk, chin resting on his chest. Using one of the newspapers as a reminder, he checked up the few new facts, condensing and criticizing them in a low-voiced monologue:

"Here's something: Larry Thayer can't account for his whereabouts from nine-fifteen to eleven o'clock the night of the attack on Miss Newman.— Humph!— 'Questions put to Dr.

Thayer elicited answers indicating that the senator's brother felt he might injure a woman's reputation by being more specific.'

"Every time you see a tall, handsome young man who's always 'saving a woman's honour,' you can put him down as a fellow who's an everlasting burden to his family.—Bunk!

"And here's Marcello.—'The artist can't explain how his studio was chosen as hiding-place for stolen ship-plans, property of Knowles. Claims blue-prints were "planted," to revive the first theory of the police that he attacked Miss Newman.'

"That's easy! — Conrad, bent on averting suspicion from Gower, has been trotting around 'planting' clues; Ross has followed him, picking them up and giving them to the newspapers.

"'Miss Conrad late last night instructed society reporters not to print announcement of her engagement to marry the accused senator; engagement broken.'—That's a lie, I know! Woman like her couldn't do a trick like that?

"Get this: A statement by Felix Conrad:

"'About Gower: I have every confidence in his innocence. I endorse his belief that the attempted murder will finally be brought to the door of a man more prominent than he.'

"Different from what he told me last night—lost his mind — clean crazy! Thinks he's got

a big trick up his sleeve. I'll hear from him — soon!"

Throwing aside his paper, the old man stared through the window at the morning sky, beginning already to look like polished steel. He tried to think what could have changed so promptly the mind of the raging, profane old dandy he had last seen in the moonlight.

Conscious of somebody standing near him, he turned his chair and looked into the blue, uncommunicative eyes of Mr. Felix Conrad.

- "I've come —" his visitor began.
- "I was just thinking about you and your unexpected change of attitude toward Gower," the detective took command of the conversation.

"That's what brings me here — that, and a desire to co-operate with you."

Hastings looked him over. He was debonair even; dressed to the acme of elegance; a man enjoying life hugely; his controlled features indicating a wholesome interest in the old man's reply.

Hastings led the way to a small consultation room, its walls hung with photographs of famous detectives.

He motioned Conrad to a chair and perched himself on a corner of the desk. Felix lit a cigarette. His ambiguous smile meant nothing.

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Hastings, looking down at him, inquired blandly:

- "Interested in your watch?"
- "My watch?"
- Mr. Conrad slipped three fingers into his watch pocket, glanced at the watch, restored it to his pocket.
- "Not that: the one you lent your secretary in his cell last evening had a hunting case."
 - "Ah, to be sure!"
- "We let him keep the watch and the dope the pellets you'd put into the case after removing the works."

The exquisite applauded that:

- "A real kindness to an unfortunate man!"
- "Not so fast!" Hastings checked him. "You guessed our game: to get him away from dope, and, when he went to pieces for lack of it, put him through a third degree of the nerves—squeeze him for everything he ever knew."
 - "Yes; I thought that."
- "But it wasn't necessary. I've filled my hand without drawing him."
- "I'm sorry.— No; not that," Felix Conrad qualified, adjusting his smile to a broader design. "I mean my visit here seems superfluous. Let me explain: I'm thoroughly reassured now as to his innocence of German leanings. Your eloquence last night ran away with me. But the

shooting — I'm fair, I hope. There's a chance - er - a woman, you know: always surprising. I should be glad to inquire into that."

"What for? — to fool me?"

Felix ignored that, and concluded: "I had intended to point out that, in such an inquiry, nothing is so sure to be productive of the truth as the pretence - let us say, the guise - of friendship and affection. Gower would be frank - with me."

The detective's contempt was terrible. His voice had new metal in it.

"There's something I want to get off my chest. I've had years of contact with crooks, some of whom I admired. I've learned that there are people whose souls have come into the world slanted, crooked; and yet, they have ability, courage, real blood in their veins."

The exquisite, slowly swinging his cane, assumed an expression of severity - sternness coloured by boredom. These annals of crime.-He sighed.

"Others," the detective continued, "have crept up through the years, stealing safely; pinching off a little here and going back for more when they saw they wouldn't be caught; cutting off a little there and going back for more when they saw they could get away with it - always playing safe, and always rotten.

"They're smeared with the ooze of life. They've got sick eyes and rotten brains; not even the gristle of courage.

"You get me, don't you?"

Felix, abstaining from comment, watched him, the pupils of his hard, concealing eyes reduced to the size of pin-points as he concentrated his mind, trying to guess Hastings' real object.

"The smeared ones," the detective said, and clucked his tongue; "they're such liars, Mr. Conrad — and I hate a liar."

Felix, cool and inquiring, waited.

"So now," the old man finished, "you understand why you and I can't work together."

"Why?" Conrad's shameless affrontery increased the detective's wrath.

"Listen!" he said roughly, head thrown back, eyes squinting under his spectacles. "I've got Gower dead to rights: on the double charge, treason and the shooting. And don't you forget it! Keep it in your mind, and yourself out of trouble!"

He swung himself off the desk, and, with the quickness of action peculiar to him when he needed it, jerked open the door to his outer office, stepped through it, and slammed it behind him.

Five minutes later he had forgotten Conrad and was calling Mrs. Gilbert Fontaine on the telephone. Ever since his interview with her, the tragedy of her face had haunted him. She must learn — and from his lips — that the secret he had carried from Florence Lockridge to her was unknown to him, was not a part of the city's rumour. He wanted to make amends.

Scofield, one of his assistants, came in hurriedly, announcing:

"A present for you - from the chief."

He put a revolver on Hastings' desk.

Hastings picked it up and "broke" it.

"Brand new," he said. "Smith and Wesson, forty-four; fired once; empty shell missing.— All right, Sco: what's the story?"

"Chief said he thought you'd be interested. One of our fellows picked that gun up yesterday morning, and reported it, number and all. This morning a report from Norfolk came in. That's what I say: the chief's system of cataloguing every man buying stuff of this kind throughout the country is fine!"

" Prove it, then."

"Norfolk reported this gun bought there four days ago. You know; report identifies each gun — make, calibre, everything. Our man found it in Potomac Park, right on the bank. Owner must have thought he'd thrown it into the water. He —"

Hastings was standing up. Scofield's story had dragged him out of the chair.

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"Knowles!" he said, putting a heavy hand on Scofield's shoulder. "Man who bought that gun in Norfolk was Robert F. Knowles."

"Right!" Scofield agreed.

Hastings plopped back into his chair.

"I didn't think Knowles was in on the shooting," he said. "That's what! — I thought it was Gower. By golly, it was Gower! — Get Ross on the wire!"

Ross answered promptly. Hastings asked him, without preface:

"Seen Knowles this morning?"

"Yes." The chief of police was far from cordial.

"Anything about a gun?"

"Yes. You're welcome to it. He admitted ownership; said he threw it away soon after he got to Washington; afraid he might use it if he got into a temper with anybody."

"How about the one shot, the empty shell?"

"Oh, that? Said he fired it once, in the air—it had a silencer."

"Thanks," Hastings snapped. "Goo'bye!" He confided to Scofield:

"Another chance at the truth ruined. Ross—dunder-headed ass! His questioning merely prepares a suspect against sensible examination.—Sco, I'd give everything I haven't got if I'd had first crack at Knowles on this!"

"You may squeeze it out of him yet."

The old man rejected the consolation. The fat is in the fire! Who would swear now that twer's revolver sent the bullet into the girl's ad — or that Knowles' gun did it? Who could ear to it, either way? — Nobody!

His appointment with Mrs. Fontaine was for o o'clock. She came into the drawing-room d was standing near the table before he was 'are of her presence.

He sprang to his feet and bowed.

"You are kind, generous --"

"Never mind that," she cut short his thanks r being allowed to see her. "Say what you me to say — and don't waste time — please."

Her voice now was the voice in which she had lated to him the story of herself and Felix onrad. He had gone forward to meet her: ere was only the width of the table between em.

In one of his swift, photographic glances, he ticed that the ash-like paleness of her face is not diminished, and that her whole body d retained its curious stiffness and lack of se.

"I came," he said gently, "to ask your forgivess of —"

"Please!" She interrupted him again. Please, don't keep me longer than is necessary.

I know what you want. I've been expecting you ever since I read the morning papers."

She lowered her eyes, and stood still as a statue.

"You saw the statement that Larry Thayer couldn't explain his whereabouts that night; because it might involve a woman's reputation. I knew you'd think of me."

She seemed enormously proud of the unimportant prevision.

"I've known for hours exactly what I should say to you. I don't blame you, the agent in this. I don't — really. But the principal — I shall punish him. You'll see.

"However, his guess was good, or his information — Larry Thayer, during the time for which he can't account satisfactorily, was — he is a physician —"

Her neck was suddenly larger, visibly so. She paused.

"He's a physician," she was able to say before he could choose the words he wanted, "and he was in consultation—or at work—what does it matter?—to save a woman's reputation, a—"

She looked at the detective out of eyes that were old.

"— my reputation," she finished the grim declaration.

On that, she left the table, turned from him.

At the library door, she stopped, supporting herself with one hand against the door-frame.

"Make the most of it," she said, the words coming from her lips in a dragging sing-song. "I really — don't — care —"

She went out, closed the door.

He looked at the door a long time. He felt lonely—and frightened. He had done a dreadful thing: smashed a woman's life. There was a lump in his throat.

And her talk of an "agent" and a "principal": whose agent was he, supposedly? — and why? Was her mind affected? . . .

There was another woman he must see, a different woman, a woman also hurt and distressed. But Rosalie Conrad had courage. That was all that mattered: courage.

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ROSALIE REVEALS A SECRET

R. CONRAD glanced about with evident approval. Although it was late afternoon, that hour when Washington's heat is heavy and still, his daughter's "den" was comfortable, cool.

Rosalie herself — wearing a simple house gown of some filmy, light-grey stuff, brightened with ribbon of old rose — looked wonderfully refreshed.

The afternoon papers had made much of Larry's refusal to reveal his whereabouts the night the crime had been committed. Worse than that, a disquieting rumour, as vague as it was unpleasant, had found publication: that Senator Brandon had warned Dr. Thayer of close surveillance of Miss Newman by federal operatives, and that the physician had carried the warning to her at once.

Rosalie could not have discounted such comment and its significance, her father reflected. That and the contents of the note he had showed her last night should have depressed her. Instead of that, however, she was optimistic, assured.

"Why risk talking to me?" she asked.

She was seated at her desk, newspapers scattered on the floor.

"Risk?" he repeated.

"You had me called twice today," she explained, "when you knew I'd had a sleepless night. You wouldn't have done that if you hadn't been anxious to talk. Hence, the warning."

"The warning," he said, "I shall disregard." His speech took on its old smoothness, now that he was sure of her hearing him through.

"I'm glad, if I may say so, that you've kept secret the incident of last night."

"How do you know I have?" she asked, moving her chair so that she looked straight into his eyes.

"I beg your pardon; I spoke too generally. I meant, you hadn't given it to the newspapers." " Not yet."

Their attitude was like that of business men in the preliminaries of a large transaction. father-daughter relationship was gone. But his affability was perfect.

"I'm glad it isn't published," he welcomed her information. "It leaves room for discussion.-Let me make my proposal, thus: if you continue your reticence as to the air-gun, I shall duplicate it in regard to the note and its contents, the open declaration of John Thayer's indiscretions - and Dr. Thaver's."

"I can't do that," she refused instantly.

He sighed lightly, lit a cigarette, tapped his finger-nails against the silver case.

He recognized the futility of argument.

"Very well," he concealed the greater part of "We'll leave it, so: as long as his uneasiness. the air-gun incident is kept quiet, nothing will be said about the Newman woman's note - of accusation."

He blew smoke spirals toward the ceiling.

She spoke first.

- "Oh," she said in a new access of impatience, "why don't you break the grip this wretched man has on vou?"
 - " Meaning —?"
 - "David Gower of course."
- "He hasn't any. I told you last night. him much in kindness: an obligation I intend to honour."

"But you can't save him. Nothing can!"

He got up and walked to the mantel, looking for an ash tray. When he came back, he did not sit down, but stood rocking himself slowly on the balls of his feet.

"I request advice now — about Riley, if I may

— you know him pretty well, don't you? — He'd consider a request, coming from you?"

She stiffened. Less than a year ago Dr. Riley had asked her to marry him.

"I remember, of course." Felix divined her thought. "I was wondering — man of good principles?"

"Really!" She was frankly indignant. "It's something new — in you: this penchant for offending good taste."

He refused to be provoked.

"If you and I," he said calmly, "could see, ahead of everybody else, the bullet which wounded Zimony Newman, we'd be in the commanding position.— The bullet, when extracted, will show at what range the shot was fired, or from whose revolver — all those details."

He paused, his glance meeting hers.

"You say," he continued, forced by her silence to clearer statement, "Thayer is innocent — or, more exactly, both Thayers are innocent. I say Gower is. Let Riley get that bullet to us before others have seen it, and we shall prove our 'clients' innocent. And more, we'll be in a position to punish the guilty.— Now, if your making the request is not — er — possible, is it probable that he would act on established business lines, if he saw in it a personal advantage — financially, for instance?"

ble."

"You mean - bribery?"

"Bribery — if we like ugly names for things." She looked down, rearranging the old-rose ribbon at her elbow. He smiled, thinking of Mary Fontaine. Like her, Rosalie would be "sensi-

When she raised her eyes again to his, he stepped back. It was not that he feared the scorn of her look. He had been confronted by scorn before. But this woman — his daughter — burned into him now with a glance the mortifying knowledge that he had made a fool of himself.

"Haven't you done a low thing?" she asked.

"In trying to save a friend?"

Suddenly he let loose his anger. She could see it surge upward and put its marks upon him.

"Let me tell you something," he burst forth; "you'd better wake up to the fact that this whole city is stewing in the worst mess of suspicion, scandal and rotten gossip that ever hit a woman!"

He snatched away the cigarette which, in this uncontrolled storm of language, danced to the wider movement of his lips.

"Look to your own name, and quit this jokebusiness of helping this burlesque Lochinvar!"

She turned from him, picked up a letter, seemed to read. Without looking around, she

knew he had gone to the door. She heard his words over her shoulder:

"They tell you they've got the goods on Gower! Bosh! Gower will be a free man tonight.—And you'd better step from under!

"I refuse, refuse utterly, to stand idly by while accused men lie about him and about me, using us as a smoke-screen behind which they can work safely for their own salvation. That's final."

Clicking of the latch as the door swung shut announced his departure. She put down the letter she had pretended to read.

Her father's last defiance had shaken her. Back of its uncompromising hatred, she had heard a note of assurance that sounded more dangerous than empty threat.

How strong was he, anyway? He always had unsuspected resources.

Aline knocked; Mr. Hastings was asking for her.

"Here, Aline - and at once."

Her relief at the prospect of seeing the old man was great. She realized how much she craved kindly counsel.

He came in, beaming and benignant. She went with him to the two chairs by the open window.

"So fresh, so rested," he smiled, over his spec-

tacles; "and — forgive an old man's directness — so beautiful."

She coloured — and felt that she had known him all her life, this old man who had come into her life only yesterday!

"But I won't keep you in suspense," he added.

"Everything's as good as we could expect; better, perhaps, than we had a right to expect. The case against Gower stands, complete and whole, on two charges: treason and shooting Miss Newman."

Yielding to the soft comfort of the chair, he relaxed, hands clasped across his chest.

She, too, was resting, her head against the chair-back at an angle which gave him a three-quarter view of her face. Her lips were a little parted. She was profoundly moved.

"It's so big," she breathed, "this certainty, this end of all our fears. Tell me — everything," she urged softly, sitting erect, her young form like the graceful slenderness of flowers.

"I was sure of it this morning, I think: that Gower, in spite of all other evidence, was the man we wanted. We needed only two things to make certain: first, something to show that he was identified with others in this German work; second, that the bullet which struck down the Newman girl corresponded to the bullets he used.

"Senator Thayer gave us the first fact, the

connection with other spies. He got it from a waiter at the Wareham, named Bayardair, who had noticed that a woman — later he identified her as Miss Newman, from photographs — came sometimes to the Wareham and lunched by herself.

"She invariably took a table beside or in front of — never behind — a certain man. This man spoke to her without seeming to do so: did it by conversing with somebody at his own table.

"For instance, the day she was shot, she Iunched at the Wareham, and was told by this man that 'the report'— whatever that was—must be made immediately.— Couldn't want anything better than that, could we?"

"Who was the man?" Her voice was weak.

"Bayardair didn't know — but his description was so detailed that nobody could doubt. It was David Gower."

"And all of Zimony's 'hatred' of him," Rosalie said in wonder, "all her descriptions of his 'mad infatuation' for her, the ugly gossip: nothing but deception, to keep us from suspecting!"

"Yes," he retorted drily.

"And the bullets, Mr. Hastings?"

"The bullet that's hidden in the girl's head," he replied, "is a duplicate of the bullets that were in Gower's revolver when Thayer found the gun in Gower's closet.—The chief of police got hold of an X-ray specialist. He's done a lot of this work; claims he's perfected a machine that gives immense visibility. He reports that the bullet's hollow—like a communication bullet."

"Could he — did he pretend to say whether it contained a communication paper?"

"Oh, no. The paper couldn't be seen in his pictures. The existence of the hollow was all they showed — but that was all we needed."

Her eyes were at that moment so expressive of relief that her face was transfigured.

"But —" She paused. "Let me think —" But it was Hastings who spoke first:

"I want to ask you this: what is your father's idea in helping Gower and hurting Thayer?"

She replied directly to that.

"Jealousy, Mr. Hastings."

He did not understand.

"My father's always been like that," she enlarged; "jealous of any man who was fond of me. He's not an affectionate man. I think he doesn't know what real love is. But he would do anything, pay anything, to keep me in his house all his life — as an ornament. I wonder if you understand it."

"Yes," Hastings told her; "I do now — perfectly."

They were silent again. Inside the room it



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almost dark. In the streets, the lights in deepening twilight had turned from white ellow.

I've made up my mind," she said after a long e.

Tell me—if you have to tell anybody." n arc-light across the street threw its rays n her face. She looked grieved, and tired. Oh!" she cried, "if I don't tell you all of it, 'm not outspoken and detailed, make me! 't let me be a coward!"

t first, she was uncertain of words; but she me coherent, and told him the story of disring her father trying to hide Gower's air-

ne told him, also, what her father had said is debt to Gower, and how he had showed Zimony Newman's note. Finishing that, described Conrad's proposals of an hour ago. astings was no longer recumbent. The rehad straightened him up. His first thought of her:

Since your father's been so active, so much e active than I thought, we shan't be able to him off the witness stand."

I don't think he should be kept off," she said ply.

e felt the need of some visible act, to express

the intensity of his admiration. He bent nearer to her, put out his hand and let it rest, a light touch, on her shoulder.

"I must tell you something more," she said quickly. "I can't let you go without telling—" She threw back her head, the uplifted chin a sign of courage. "Later on, you may think of me as an unnatural daughter; but I'm not—I'm not! It was my father who made me love my country so! His eloquence, his indefatigable energy in exposing traitors, enthused me more than I can describe.

"I stopped making bandages and raising funds. I wanted work, hard work, the kind that would require all of myself. And I found it: threw myself into it, never dreaming of the tragedy it would bring me. I mean the tragedy of having to tell you all these recent things about my father: how he's hurt himself helping a creature like Gower, and attacking a man, a real man, like John Thayer!"

She looked at him with appealing eyes.

"Don't you see, Mr. Hastings, what I'm doing, what I have done — my work?"

He could get from neither her speech nor her face a hint of what she meant.

"I am," she said, "your colleague." He could not believe her.

ROSALIE REVEALS A SECRET 263

You!"

I; yes," she said, with an irony that dissed him. "Loving my country so, I have ad myself bound by conscience and my oath vork quietly and to report to you the things e by my father, the man whose eloquence re me to the work."

le exclaimed again:

A secret agent!"

Here is proof," she said, dreariness colouring words again: "my badge."

he leaned toward him and lifted the bow of rose ribbon at her breast, revealing the metal ld.

Your badge - yes," he said slowly in a tone was like awe; "you've made it, for all who r it, a badge of nobility."

e exhausted his vocabulary of homage.

astings, leaving the house, found Scofield ing on the sidewalk, to give him news:

Those bullets — for communication? You id Gower's revolver loaded with 'em?" Yes."

And couldn't find any more? Made the case nst Gower tight?"

Umph-huh."

Ross beat you: he's found more of 'em." Where? Who had 'em?"

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"Knowles."

Mr. Hastings' hot retort struck Mr. S as irrelevant:

"Felix Conrad! Damn him!"

Later that night David Gower, as Conrepredicted, was given his freedom — on bail.

Later than that, two women, sitting at a window overlooking Eighteenth Streef, low-toned and uneasy, for more than an One actuated by love, the other by a bitter I they dealt with facts vital to a solution Melwood mystery.

Rosalie Conrad had appealed to Martaine.

XXI

THAYER PRESENTS A SOLUTION

AMERON HOUGH was distinctly perturbed. Looking into the young senator's lined, old face, he appreciated for the first time the gravity of this affair in which he played a minor rôle. The interview irked him.

"So you remembered, Mr. Secretary, exactly?"

"I did—at last, this morning," replied Hough. "The thing popped into my mind without rhyme or reason—a full picture of that whole scene, that encounter which, as I had told Miss Conrad, I knew would be of tremendous value to you."

The diplomat's nervousness increased. Theyer was mystified by it.

"And it is valuable?" he urged, impatient.

"You may judge. It was on the fifteenth of last May, at the Wareham. I had lunch there with an acquaintance. After lunch, he and I sat for a while on one of the sofas in the lobby.

"Behind us, so close that she could hear every word we said, was a woman dressed in black a very handsome woman."

- "Zimony Newman?"
- "Zimony Newman.—And I remember now that what my luncheon companion said to me, was a statement of what Berlin wanted to find out, through spies, concerning the Wilson attitude toward Germany after the war.
- "Most important of all," concluded Hough, "his statement, don't you see, was also his instructions to Miss Newman: what she must discover, and where."

Thayer welcomed that. It gave him the facts to lift the waiter Bayardair's statement above question.

- "Great stuff: this story!" He repeated his approval. "Very fine of you very! to take the trouble."
 - "Delighted to do it, Senator."
- "This man Gower, now: know anything more about him?"
- "Gower?" repeated Hough. "I haven't said anything about Gower."
 - "Not about David Gower?"
- "Why, no! It was Conrad Felix Conrad." Thayer stared, leaning forward, his eyes dull from the confusion against which he struggled.
- "Felix Conrad," Hough elaborated, "did the instructing, gave the Newman woman her orders."

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The senator slumped in his chair.

"I've handled this crudely," his visitor lamented. "I've given you a shock."

"Not at all," Thayer fought for calm. "I fooled myself. The description of the man came to me in such a way that I could have applied it to either Gower or Conrad. I chose Gower."

Hough's embarrassment returned.

"You're right," Thayer continued. "Conrad — Conrad was her 'chief.'"

He hoped he did not look as broken up as Hough's expression indicated. Did he show how he shrank from the thing which at that moment was shaping itself in his mind—that he must punish Conrad and hurt Rosalie?

He was relieved when Hastings came into the office.

The old man, however, saw the new lines near the younger man's eyes, and the greyness of the pained face.

Without rest during the last four days, Thayer had managed by letter and wire the activities of his campaign for renomination. With a vigour that never failed, he had hypnotized himself and his friends into the sanguine feeling that solution of the Melwood mystery was "just around the corner."

And through all the suspense, disappointment

had never touched him. Hastings, familiar with this, was the more astonished now by the senator's appearance.

Here was not only mental exhaustion, he decided; physical collapse also was imminent.

He reached for his knife and wood, and spoke hurriedly:

"I've got something to tell you, Senator. It's —"

"I've got something to say, myself." Thayer broke in harshly. "And it's interesting—even if it's disagreeable."

His lips were twisted by a forced smile. His fevered eyes were like a queer challenge.

"I know now," he continued, a little hoarse.

"I know now who shot Zimony Newman — who killed her — for she'll die, soon."

Hastings tried to joke: "I know, son. We've all had that inspiration a dozen times — and each time wrong. Better do as I do, plod along, hear this and that, finally arrive — somewhere.

"For instance: I found the chauffeur who drove Knowles to the station Monday night. He says his passenger told him to go through Potomac Park. Glancing at the mirror on his wind-shield, he saw Knowles stand up in the cab and throw something toward the river: the revolver—see? If, by any chance, Gower isn't guilty, Knowles is."

- "But I know --"
- "That ends all doubt as to whose gun it was: Knowles' or your brother's," Hastings plunged "Incidentally, Dr. Thayer has an alibi for Monday night — if he ever needs it. I know —"
 - "As I said, I -- "Thayer began.
- "Listen to me! Will you, Senator?" Hastings knew he had to give to this scene all the strength in him if he was to carry it through as he wished.
- "Last night I had a long talk with Miss Conrad."

He held Thayer quiet now by sheer force of will.

- "She sent you away from her because she feared your identification with a family sheltering a traitor would hurt you politically.
- "And she wants you to come back now. or tomorrow, or a year hence. She didn't say so - but I know it. She --"

The senator stood up and struck the desk with his fist. He leaned forward from the waist, so that his face was close to the detective's. His look now was entirely scowling anger.

- "Felix Conrad shot Zimony Newman!" he announced through gritted teeth.
 - "Felix?"

The detective, looking up to him, made no demonstration of surprise. Chiefly, one might have thought, he resented Thayer's indifference to Rosalie's feelings and wishes.

"Felix Conrad — yes! And yet, when I know that; when I'm going to prove it; you tell me to ask, and to expect, his daughter's love!"

"Yes! — I repeat it. And, if you don't do it, you'll smash her life and your own! — I tell you, Gower shot Miss Newman. It was Gower!"

The old man went back to his whittling.

"Now," he added, with an air of unbelief, "your case against Conrad, Senator: let's have it. But keep your shirt on. We don't need a pile-driver to crack a nut!"

Thayer was restless, walking about the room, shifting chairs. Nervous energy kept him incessantly on the move.

"Until today I was like you," he explained; "thought Gower shot her, or possibly Knowles. The Gower assumption was all right: it was impregnable after I had read into Bayardair's statement that it was Gower who had given the woman all her instructions. That's where I fell down."

Thayer sketched Hough's story.

"But," Hastings criticized, "you need proof. His giving the woman her orders is a long way from showing he shot her—even if Hough's right."

[&]quot;It was Felix Conrad?"

[&]quot; Yes."

THAYER PRESENTS A SOLUTION

"Oh, Hough had it straight! I had Bay dair on the 'phone, a few minutes before y came in. It was Conrad who issued the 'order to Miss Newman. That's certain.

"Everything I've learned is against Coninow."

He took a bulky document, typewritten, fr a drawer of the desk, and, as he consulted kept up his restless wandering about the room

"Here's the record of David Gower's life. got it without your knowledge. I was savi it—" this with a sorry smile. "— as a ple ant surprise for you, to clinch Gower's guilt I'll give you the high lights."

He flipped the pages rapidly.

"Name is Donald Hower; he worked as neboy and bootblack.

"Known in childhood for astounding cruel

"Went to a small college in Illinois; in second year there accused of, but not convict for, first-degree murder of a student, under volting circumstances."

Exclaiming disgust, he pitched the docume into the drawer.

"Pah!—it's like coming too close to pes ence!

"He appeared later as a forger. Afterwa: Conrad gave him a job — two years after the made him 'confidential secretary.' Morph

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addict when Conrad employed him. And yet, he has in his turn, some hold on Conrad!

— There's your Gower: Conrad's confidential man!"

Thayer drove himself to further speech, his body every minute in swift, aimless motion.

"For more than four days now, an unconscious woman has withheld from the world the only available absolute proof of her assailant's identity. For the proof is the bullet that's imbedded in her brain!

"It will show Conrad's guilt. Doubt of that, it seems to me, is impossible. I wish I could doubt it!"

He spread out his hands and let them drop sharply to his sides, a gesture singularly illustrative of his wretchedness.

"I know these things!" he declared. "You'll know them if you'll listen to me. But

The door to the outer room opened.

"Excuse me, Senator," Thayer's secretary said; "but it's an urgent message for Mr. Hastings. Dr. Riley will operate on Miss Newman, probe for the bullet, at half-past one."

"Great trout!" Hastings burst forth, reaching with one hand for his watch, and with the other for his hat. "It's one-twenty now!"

He trotted to the corridor door.

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- "I'm with you!" announced Thayer, catching up his coat.
- "Not by a jugful! It won't do.— I'll 'phone you the minute we know anything."

He jerked open the door.

"If you want to go somewhere, go to Felix Conrad's residence!— His daughter's still there."

IIXX

THE CRIME IN DETAIL

ELIX CONRAD, pushing apart the sliding doors, stepped from his study into the small drawing-room. He confronted seven men: Hastings, Senator Thayer, Marcello, Knowles, Gower, the chief of police and a stranger, a fat, red-faced little man who continually shifted at various angles between his lips an unlighted cigar.

Hastings introduced the stranger:

"Mr. Jermane, one of my assistants."

Whipple, after seeing that the sliding doors had been closed tight, went out, shutting the hall door behind him.

Mr. Conrad received scant attention. Every eye was on Hastings.

Baggy and wrinkled, he sprawled in a deep chair near one of the Eighteenth Street windows. He gave no sign of his hope that within the next half-hour a mystery, already described to the reading world of three continents, would be explained, and that his explanation would be proved correct.

Afterwards, some of those who now watched him remembered this.

"Under previous agreement," he began, in conversational tone, "as directed by the Attorney General, Senator Thayer has the right to witness our tests and examinations of the bullet extracted half an hour ago from Miss Newman's head by Dr. Riley. Others here are, I believe, also interested."

Exploring a coat pocket — a process accompanied by audible grunts — he found and held up to the eyes of the semi-circle confronting him a small paste-board box.

"The bullet's in here," he resumed, "properly identified. My theory—the theory of all of us—is that, if this is a communication bullet containing a message, the handwriting of the message will identify the man who shot Miss Newman."

Thayer, leaning forward, elbows on his knees, moved with such impatience that Hastings looked at him.

"Open it!" the senator suggested, a wave of his hand imputing to the others a suspense as great as his.

Gower, having inhaled a tremendous volume of smoke, let it curl slowly from his mouth and nostrils. He was smiling.

"All right," Hastings assented, untying with slow fingers the heavy tape around the box. "We'll see."

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Conrad intervened:

"If you'll forgive me. Senator — and you, Mr. Hastings — I should like to make a statement: remarking in advance that it's not a theory."

Thayer's impatience was not diminished.

"Why not make it afterwards?"

"Because at this stage it will command from every man in this room the attention it deserves. So far as I'm concerned, 'afterwards' would be too late."

Looking from Hastings to Thayer, he flicked the ash from his cigarette.

"Of course," he added suavely, "I'd be the last one to inflict upon this—er—crowd the least avoidable delay: and, too, in my own house."

Thayer consented.

"Go ahead, then — if you're certain of its importance."

· " Thanks."

Felix crossed from his chair near the sliding doors to the screened fireplace, to drop his half-consumed cigarette on the tiled hearth. In that minute, when he presented his composure to their sharp inspection, he seemed to them more self-sufficient, more indifferent to what they thought of him, than they had ever seen him.

"I take it," he said, "you understand that

such a message as you expect to find may touch me nearly. My defence of Gower, my secretary, has been so insistent that, if anything developed to incriminate him, it also would — er — let us say, might embarrass me."

He took his seat again.

"Therefore, in a lively sense, not even Senator Thayer can look forward with greater interest than mine to this revelation."

He drew an envelope from his breast pocket, and from the envelope a sheet of note paper, folded once.

"This communication," he said, "came to me by a circuitous route. It was written by Zimony Newman. It may have been intended for me. If it was, the contents may be regarded as expression of a woman's desire to put me on the trail of a new treachery, and thus avenge herself for slights which she deeply resented. Such a supposition is weak, as you'll see later on.

"On the other hand, it may have been meant for a confederate; a statement of spy-work begun and an explanation of how it could be carried on if she, Miss Newman, received dangerous injury or died."

His inquisitive glance swept the group, rested momentarily on the face of each man—except Gower. Not one gave the slightest sign of previous knowledge of the note.

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"It says—" he began with his clear, precise enunciation. "Let me read it to you."

He had the air of a man gossiping in his club.

"'L. Thayer manageable but uninformed. J. gave me bits; more, all you need, tonight. Appointment.'

"That's all. There's no signature. Suppose you read it — pass it on."

He gave it to Hastings.

Attention had gone now from Conrad to the senator. Thayer, although he was still nervous and impatient, kept himself in hand.

"What are you getting at, Mr. Conrad?" he asked, amazed. "You know that's rank forgery!"

Hastings passed the note to the chief of police. Felix chose another cigarette before he answered Thayer.

"Exactly what I thought - at first."

The detective, slanting a glance under his spectacles, took up the colloquy:

"At first?"

"Yes. Such an unqualified accusation against two men who nobody could have suspected of dishonesty — such a charge, I say, struck me as absolutely incredible."

Hastings saw Thayer's expression change. It was no longer simply anger. In place of that, was the queer, disturbed look he had worn during the first few minutes of their talk in his office.

In a calmer frame of mind, the senator would have resisted the pressure of this extraordinary scene. The dictates of personal dignity and the obligations of his official position would have compelled him to await a more suitable occasion to make a statement. But now his desire for combat responded to the mood of the men before him. He would say what he had on his mind, because they expected it.

The detective perceived the resolve; and, trying to prevent his carrying it out, turned on Conrad.

"Well!" he said curtly. "What we want here is less of the 'absolutely incredible' and more of the credible! Let's get down to business."

"You express there my only wish," Felix retorted, unruffled. "I shall delay you one minute longer — no more."

His persistence was not to be gainsaid.

"I've had this note for three days. I assumed the responsibility of withholding it because I considered it a forgery. And, as long as I believed that—could believe it—I refused the even greater responsibility of blasting without sure cause a brilliant man's career. I submitted—"

The softly cadenced flow of his words was stopped by a peculiar sound. It was like the attempted out-cry of a man smothering.

It had come from Marcello. The artist, after reading the note Ross had handed him, had turned in his chair so that none of them could see his face.

His shoulders heaved, as if his whole torso strained to prevent a repetition of the cry grief had wrung from him: but that first lament had been intelligible to them — a declaration that the writing was genuine, Zimony Newman's; and that the beloved woman was a spy.

"I submitted that note," Conrad resumed, "to four hand-wriing experts. Their opinions—"

"Mr. Knowles," the detective interrupted, "let Mr. Jermane have it, will you? — Take a look at it, Jerry — and at this," he directed, holding out another sheet of paper: "a specimen of her real writing."

Mr. Jermaine, retiring to the window behind Hastings, worked with a magnifying glass.

"If I may conclude —" Conrad suggested.

"Let's!" The old man was savage.

"I submitted it to four experts, so oppressive was my sense of responsibility. Two pronounced it genuine; two declared it forgery, excellently done.— For my part, I still hope and believe it's forgery."

"Why, Mr. Conrad?"

The query came, after a pause, from the chief of police.

"Because," Felix answered it coolly, "I've reason to believe that I, like the senator, am being persecuted; and, like him, may be attacked with this lowest of all weapons, forgery. If that bul—"

Two voices stopped him in the middle of the word. Thayer and Gower spoke simultaneously.

Although Thayer was on his feet, while Gower remained seated, Felix turned, expectant, toward his secretary.

Thayer, however, would not be denied.

His quick mind had discovered Conrad's design, a plan to parade his fairness in proving the Newman note a forgery; and, that done, to influence everybody toward thinking him the victim of a similar trick when the message inside the bullet should be laid before them:—all this, of course, on the assumption that the bullet carried a message and that the message could hurt Conrad.

"Since my name," he said to Gower, "has been injected into this discussion in a way suggestive of a wish to be merciful to me, I hope, Mr. Gower, you'll let me say that the very thing I have no wish to claim is also the very thing I have no

intention of granting to another: that thing is mercy."

"With pleasure," Gower replied to that.

The two men who had fought each other—both accused of the attack—each crying the other's guilt—took matters now out of Conrad's hands.

To Hastings, the demeanour of Gower was puzzling. He had spoken with an indignation equal to Thayer's. But, seeing the spirit which dominated Thayer, he gave up at once the precedence his employer had offered him.

And he did it, the detective observed, with an air that proved him satisfied: more than that, with a strange look of pleasure.

He smoked voluminously, his head thrown back, his face that of a boy, day-dreaming.

"I speak from a sense of duty," Thayer began. "Facts which I am about to disclose can neither give me present satisfaction nor afford me future consolation. If I could reconcile it to my conscience, I should be silent on this subject to the end of my days.

"Realizing this, you may be patient with me."

The abnormal tension at which he laboured, the unnatural vibrance of his hoarse voice, the grief they saw in his eyes, held every man in the room to the straight thread of his logic.

For the time being, they forgot the box which

the detective still held in his right hand.
"I know," he continued, "who shot Miss
Zimony Newman.— First, however, I want you
to remember that nine-thirty o'clock in the evening was the most important hour in the sordid
tragedy we're considering.

"Most of you have seen one of the attacks to which Mr. Gower is subject. In the last one I witnessed, he said, 'Conrad — Conrad and myself — nine-thirty.' He would have said more if Mr. Conrad hadn't stopped him. His tone, however, demonstrated the horror with which he regarded the business of that hour.

"In a conversation between Mr. Hastings and Mr. Conrad — which gave the latter his first news that Miss Newman had been shot — Conrad, losing his usual self-possession, repeated again and again 'nine twenty-six to nine thirty-four,' the figures describing the duration of Mr. Knowles's absence from the Melwood when he went after the ice-cream. These figures included, please remember, the significant hour, nine-thirty.

"It is enough now to say that Mr. Conrad, in his meaningless monologue, appeared to be wondering whether anybody had acted, at nine-thirty, in a way to embarrass him. He, like Gower, had no love for that special time, nine-thirty.

"Harry Fields told me Miss Newman had

never, any evening, had anybody, man or woman, in her apartment at nine-thirty. They either came early and left a few minutes past nine; or, more rarely, they came in at nine forty-five. Mr. Marcello has corroborated that — also Dr. Thayer, my brother.

"Nine-thirty, then, was the big hour for Miss Newman.

"Why? Because at that time, whenever imperative, she received from, or transmitted to, somebody queries and facts about which there must be no delay. Half-past nine was the vital moment. Neither love nor hate could change it. Life and death hung on it.

"Miss Newman's solitude at this hour was essential because of the method used to transmit facts: communication bullets. The hour for this sort of correspondence had to be set in advance, for safety's sake. And she had to be there, awaiting the bullet, to read the message and destroy it as soon as read. I—"

Felix interrupted:

" If __"

Thayer wheeled upon him:

"I said, Mr. Conrad, nobody could prevent my saying what I had to say!"

"Certainly,-"

"I repeat it now!"

His bearing had in it finality.

Felix yielded without a trace of embarrassment. Hastings, seeing his ease of manner, reflected:

"Gower did the shooting. That's sure!— Thayer's on the wrong track."

"Leaving temporarily our consideration of nine-thirty," Thayer took up his story, "we examine an interesting situation:

"There was in Washington, at the time Miss Newman was shot, a skilled German agent, a 'master spy,' who gave orders and received in safety many reports.

"Last Monday the military situation in France was such that Germany wanted to get out of this war. If Berlin that day could have learned, on authority, that Woodrow Wilson would show her at the peace table a mercy not to be expected from other nations, she would have ended the war. That being so, Berlin wanted and ordered the latest information.

"The 'master spy' reported. His news was not enough.

"He had still another chance: Miss Newman, already working on this job, could be rushed and threatened into greater activity. Instant action was imperative.

"Now we return to half-past nine — it was her duty every evening at that hour to have on the mantel in her living room a sheet of steel, a 'bullet catcher.' She had to be ready. But this time something went wrong.

"Knowles, whom she intended to see and send away in ample time, did what she simultaneously had feared and yet could not believe possible. He hurt her physically, thought he had killed her by stabbing her."

The inventor, crimson under the battery of hostile glances, sat still, undenying. Thayer's eyes compelled him.

"Knowles, believing her dead—this is not guess-work, gentlemen; he has confessed to Mr. Hastings that he stabbed her—believing her dead, he left her in the bedroom, went out at twenty-six minutes past nine, intent on establishing his alibi. You know already the phonograph trick.

"She regained consciousness while he was out, buying the ice cream. The first idea to present itself to her was the nightly, inevitable performance, preparation for reception of the possible message, the bullet.

"She struggled to her feet, staggered into the living room. She made her way to the mantel, leaning against it a moment, to rest, for the final effort of taking the 'bullet catcher' from the alcove. It was kept there, in an artist's portfolio.

"Weakness had hold of her; the room spun

around her. But another effort, one more call on her energy, was necessary. She was no coward. She could lift the thirty-odd pounds of steel — had done it every evening for months—and put it in place on the mantel.

"The window was open, the wire screen raised. The 'bullet catcher' in place, she could lie down, rest. The man who had stabbed her was gone, she thought. She had more than a quarter of an hour to get herself together, invent explanation of her wound, send for a physician and deny herself to her next caller — myself.

"But she must hurry. Why run the risk of having a bullet hole in the wall — and of losing time in getting the message if the bullet penetrated far into the plaster? She might be expected to return an answer at once! Besides, the room spun more slowly now.

"She stood erect, steadying herself with a hand on the mantel. She hadn't turned on the lights in the living room; but that didn't matter. There was light enough from the bedroom. The messages had come in no more light than that.

"Her right foot left the floor, was poised, beginning the first step toward the alcove. The business of walking was an intricate act! She could—

"Quicker than thought, louder than big guns — something had overwhelmed her! Dust and

dirt like a million walls pulverized and crowding into her nostrils, steel and stone heavier than the wreckage of a city's homes, blue-blazing lights of a thousand electrocutions — and the dark

"Miss Newman, unconscious, with a bullet embedded in her skull, swung half-around at the bullet's impact, lurched forward and down, plunged through the alcove hangings.

"The hangings fell together again. Quiet was in the hot, dimly lighted room.

- "Knowles, elaborating his alibi, came back, removed the silk from the clock, kept his glance away from the bedroom, talked through the bedroom door in the hall, played out his little comedy.
- "Another caller myself came in, sat ten minutes beside the unconscious form, and went away, unsuspecting.
- "Marcello arrived; waited; made his awful discovery; summoned aid.
- "Across the street, on the third floor of the Conrad home, was a morphine addict, David Gower, who says he saw me do the stabbing which in reality was done by Knowles.
- "A man with a hard, polished face slipped past Gower's door; made his way downstairs; hid in his study the gun with which he had sent

the bullet into the woman's apartment; waited; looked at his watch again; crept back up the stairs and to the third-floor front.

"The 'bullet-catcher' he preferred was a box of sand, placed on that mantel as the steel was on Zimony Newman's. In this box there should have been a bullet answering his urgent message. There was none.

"Something utterly unforeseen had happened. His query was too urgent to have allowed Miss Newman a moment's delay. He played his electric torch on wall and floor. He found nothing.

"He went back to his study.

"Later there were loud voices outside, the street was filled with flying footsteps, an ambulance gong drummed a warning. Through the open windows came phrases, disjointed words: 'murder — a woman — an artist killed — a sweetheart —'

"He would go out, see what had happened. In the street somebody told him a Miss Newman had been stabbed, was at the point of death.—Stabbed? Yes.—Shot, perhaps? No; stabbed.—When? About ten o'clock.—Oh! ten o'clock; very good; too bad, these tragedies; people knew nothing of self-restraint!—Vulgarians!

"A few hours later, he succeeded in awaking

Gower, instructed him to get into the Melwood unseen and bring back the steel 'bullet catcher.'

"This was done. They hid the sheet of steel and the box of sand in the lumber room. Incidentally, Gower had discovered the stolen blueprints, ship plans, which they afterwards 'planted' in Marcello's studio.

"Everything was arranged. The woman obviously had read the 'master's' message and got rid of his bullet prior to being stabbed.

"Placid, amiable, conscious of ability to deal wisely with any unexpected thing, the 'master spy' went to bed — slept soundly. Felix Conrad, after all, had a pleasant night!"

XXIII

THROUGH THE SLIDING DOORS

ELIX was untouched by the attack. He waited for the restless movements which invariably, on the part of a crowd, announce the moment of the listeners' shaking off a speaker's mental dominance, introductory to the "Well, what next?"

He caught it with uncanny exactitude.

"I've had," he said, with broad contempt, "the usual experience — but with unusual promptness."

He remained seated, talking as if, in a sense, the matter did not concern him greatly.

"Everybody here realizes the pains I took to save this man as well as myself from the results of hasty action with that note. I'm repaid by an intemperate — I might say, a ludicrous — attack: mixture of unimportant facts and amazing fictions.

"In the final analysis, Thayer's fate depends chiefly upon whether that note, accusing him and his brother of treachery, was written by Zimony Newman's hand."

His composure was so well sustained, his as-

sumption of indifference so thorough, that nobody spoke while he lighted a fresh cigarette and, with a hand steady as an athlete's, flipped the match to the hearth.

"What I mean," he resumed, "is this: if that note's a forgery, then the bul—"

The interruption was from Hastings.

"How about it, Jerry? Forgery, or the woman's writing?"

Mr. Jermane, having pushed his cigar to the extreme right corner of his mouth, replied with one word through the extreme left:

"Genuine."

A bomb exploded at Hastings' feet could not have shocked him to such consternation as that answer. Surprise was the emotion of every member of the group.

The old man's confidence in the Jermane ability to pass unerring judgment on trickeries of the pen had influenced everybody. His voice, appealing to the little man for the final verdict, had been practically a declaration to this effect:

"Never mind the four experts consulted by Felix Conrad. Those fellows, for a price, say what they think you want them to say. But here's the real judgment. Take it from Jermane."

And now they had "it from Jermane."
Having decided that he would pronounce the

note a forgery, they required time to recover from the surprise of the directly opposite opinion. And, having accomplished that readjustment, they needed still more time to realize that this verdict, if correct, made Thayer's guilt an inescapable fact.

The hand-writing expert had added tremendous weight to the Gower story that the senator had stabbed the woman. For the moment, they disregarded the Knowles confession which Thayer had mentioned.

The senator guilty — this man who a few minutes ago had cried down another with an intensity scarcely credible? He was again the object of their interest, an interest not highly coloured with sympathy. They saw that he was about to spring to his feet.

First to hear a noise at the sliding doors, he hesitated. The "catch," moved by an unfamiliar hand, clicked open and shut, again opened. The doors rolled slowly apart.

Thayer, thinking instantly of Rosalie, opened his mouth to shout a warning, to tell her to turn back. But he saw his mistake. The intruder was Mary Fontaine.

She came one step into the room. The doors rolled together, a dark background emphasizing the peculiar stiffness of her figure.

Her first move was a gesture with her right

hand, commanding them to keep the seats from which they had risen at sight of her.

As if to accentuate the tragedy in her face, she wore a gown of light green, with a girdle and collar of black. The only life in all her face was the gleam of her black eyes.

Without explaining her presence — in fact, without intimation of any sort that she regarded it as demanding explanation — she asked:

"Where is that note?"

Hastings, himself wordless, took it from Jermane and, with quick stride, crossed over to where she was. He put it into her out-stretched hand.

"Do you mind going back — to your seat, Mr. Hastings?"

He went back. She had surprised them so entirely, filled their imaginations so completely, that the request did not strike them as particularly strange.

Until she used both hands to unfold the note Hastings had given her, none of them observed that she had in her left hand another piece of paper. They judged that she read, or studied, not more than a minute the one Jermane had pronounced genuine.

When she spoke, her glance was toward the floor. Her audience saw nothing but the heavy

lids. They had the feeling of listening to a woman who talked from behind a screen.

"This," she said, in a lifeless voice, "is a forgery.— Its resemblance to Zimony's writing is very great. But it isn't - in whole or in part — her writing.

"One peculiarity of hers is that she writes the letter e in two shapes: one is practically a fac-simile of the capital E used in printing: the other the e of the old Spencerian copy-books, a simple loop, shaped like an egg. And it's her unvarying custom to alternate them: first, the capital E shape, then the loop shape; third, the capital, fourth, the loop; and so on, without fail.

"In this short note, there are nine e's, and all of them the capital; not one of them a loop shape. There are other peculiarities which your expert will find upon a closer examination.

"Another thing: Zimony never uses this style of note paper. You can't find a scrap of it in her desk. She never had it in her desk." .

Mrs. Fontaine became more and more like a If she thought her presence there machine. strange, she still gave no sign. The men were motionless.

"I'd better explain that this note, according to Mr. Conrad's story, was given by Miss Newman to me, and by me to Mr. Conrad. He appears to regard as unimportant the manner in which he got a note from me.— On that phase of the affair he and I do not agree.

"He got, from me, by the employment of methods doubtless satisfactory to himself, the note Zimony had given me. Fortunately, however, I provided for my self-preservation. Before the note went into his keeping, I steamed open the envelope and copied its contents."

That announcement, reminding Hastings of how she had denied the knowledge she now professed to have, brought from him an exclamation too sharp to go unheard. He recovered himself immediately.

"A questionable procedure?" Mrs. Fontaine was saying. "Perhaps.—But justified. One protects oneself—in dealing with Mr. Conrad."

With a quick jerk of her wrist, she flipped open the folded paper in her left hand.

"Here is the copy I made of the note Zimony wrote and asked me to deliver. I am by no means certain that she intended it to go to Mr. Conrad. One may guess. She does not use his name. I read:

"'If anything serious happens to me, the result—the only result that makes the least difference to me—will be suffering, indescribable sorrow, for you and for your'—the next word is

scratched, but I read the first part of it as 'bro.' You will see it later. She continues - 'That is why, my dear one, I weep as I leave the truth for I break my heart — and yours.

- "'Everything people will say about me may not be true. Most of it will be true.
- "'You will never forgive. A man like you could never forgive the enormity of my deception.
- "'Sent here to steal the secrets confided by the President to a brilliant statesman, I have succeeded only in the awful theft of '- here something's marked out, made illegible; the note goes on —' devotion, a fearless man's adoration, even — yours.
- "'Oh, the fools who sent me here! And I the fool to come! They said, "Lead him on; seduce him to careless speech." They know nothing of souls like yours and his.
- "'You will be happy again. Into some woman's life you will bring the tenderness, and thoughtfulness, and mystic wonder of that worship which you learned - must have learned from the gods.
- "'I can't I can't' the 'can't' is underscored - 'look into your eyes and tell you I am a spy, fighting you and yours. I have courage only to write it.
 - "'Good-bye, my own Greatheart."

Her hand dropped to her side. She stood a moment, silent.

"If you want these, Mr. Hastings?"

"Good! I do!"

He hurried to her.

She gave him the note Conrad had presented, accusing the Thayers, and the letter she had read aloud. As she did so, she looked at Felix. She addressed him in a voice so low that only he and Hastings caught the words:

"Mr. Felix Conrad - quits!"

For the first time, the detective saw what she had meant by saying at the end of his second visit to her:

"You're only an agent. My business is with the man who made this possible for you."

She had given Conrad credit for hauling into light the secret Florence Lockridge's letter had contained!

Felix, without even a guess at what she hinted, had the presence of mind to pass it by. He rose from his chair and bowed, as if to thank her for what she had done.

She put her hands behind her, rolled open the doors, took a backward step across the threshold, was gone.

XXIV

THE STORY GOWER TOLD

OWER, starting to his feet, was stopped again by Conrad.

"A bizarre incident," Felix said calmly; "and puzzling. She bears out my statement of the Newman woman's having sent a letter to Dr. Thayer. We all see, of course, that the one she read aloud clears both the Thayers—magnificently. As I had said, I couldn't believe them guilty.

"But here is still the puzzle: this note which Mrs. Fontaine most certainly put into my hands. It asserts the gross guilt of the Thayers—and Mr.—er—the new expert pronounces it genuine, Miss Newman's writing."

Dignified, deprecating Mrs. Fontaine's theatric interruption, he spoke with authority, lending to the force of his logic the charm of an enunciation that approached the musical.

He almost dominated them all.

Thayer, revolving in his mind Mrs. Fontaine's acquittal of his brother and himself, felt no desire to speak. He was less intent on bringing to conclusion his case against Conrad. Other members of the group, not yet fully recovered from the sensationalism of Thayer's speech and Mrs. Fontaine's story, were in a state of mind close to aimlessness.

Felix was keenly alive to this; used it. The slightest agitation on his part would reduce him to their level, destroy the mental superiority that was his so far. And, at best, their interregnum of confusion would be brief. He did not delay.

"We're back to my original statement," he reminded them.

His voice was colder. His features went to greater hardness. Sternness became a part of him.

"I was explaining that I, like Senator Thayer, had become the victim of persecution. Forgery, it seems more than ever likely, has been used against him. Similarly, I'm forced to think, it has been used against me. If that bullet, there in Hastings' hand, contains a note calculated to embarrass me, I venture the prediction that the forger—"

Hastings assumed command:

"I'll see in a moment."

He lifted the top of the paste-board box.

"I thought," Felix objected, "the agreement was to hear my statement first."

"Don't open it - not yet, Mr. Hastings!"

Gower refused to be gagged any longer. He was on his feet. Determination — like the ghost of courage — was in his attitude.

And yet, Hastings saw, fear lingered in his voice. He was afraid either of Conrad or of what Conrad might say. To the eyes of everybody, as they watched him, he was a coward, driven to remonstrance by knowledge that already his feet were in a trap.

"My secretary —" Conrad began.

But Hastings preferred Gower's story.

"Don't open it? — Why not?" he asked, deaf to the employer.

"I'll tell you," Gower took the opportunity: "tell you in few words. I see how things are going — see better even than the senator did."

He was so anxious to be heard that he seemed in some degree servile.

"All right," the old man encouraged him. "Go ahead."

"Thanks."

Gower was trembling; his hands were in continuous motion; his head teetered a little. He cleared his throat twice, to steady his voice.

"First, about myself: I know Major Ross and the Department of Justice have the record of my life. I've been in prison; tried to reform; succeeded; failed; succeeded again; failed again."

He passed his hand wearily across his forehead.

"There's no future for me. Right living, far as I'm concerned, is the pluperfect subjunctive. I'm destroyed. Ruin, irredeemable and eternal, got me before I ever saw Washington.

"And to the written record of that ruin, my employer—the wealthy clubman, the art dilettante, the pursuer of spies, the hunter of traitors—"

The words, hot with scorn and coming helterskelter past his lips, made the air electric; it crackled to their impact.

"— my employer, Felix Conrad, is trying now to add a postscript to that record. But he'll never do it with my consent!

"The truth is horrible enough. I can, for that very reason, afford to deny the lies of any man, and, without fear of the future, deal only with the truth."

Conrad, smiling a little, addressed himself to Ross:

"Really, Major, my patience is exhausted. In my own house, too, this drug-stimulated insolence is—"

"Hear him out!" Hastings said sharply. "We listened to you." The detective turned to Ross: "I beg your pardon — but my suggestion's fair?"

"Yes," the major agreed.

Felix chose another cigarette, betook himself to meditation — sighed.

"This note," Gower continued; "this accusation Zimony Newman is supposed to have written against the Thayers: pronounced genuine by two experts, forgery by two other experts; it's a forgery. Conrad knows that. I know it. Twenty years ago the police of a mid-western town described me as the cleverest forger in America.

"Their tribute may have been deserved. At any rate, the skill by which they knew me then is the thing that has resulted in my being here now, to make a confession. But remember this: the words with which I confess are the words with which I accuse. I go, but not alone!"

Keeping his glance on Hastings—as if he had before him every instant the old man's purpose to prove him guilty—he snapped forefinger against thumb, a careless gesture toward his employer.

For a few moments he rose to impressiveness. The assemblage believed him, believed he welcomed his own ruin to bring about the destruction of another. He *felt* their confidence, responded to it. It was as if his weak hands, suddenly strong, seized and threw the remnants of his better self into the holocaust of retribution.

"I forged that note accusing Senator Thayer and his brother - did it under Felix Conrad's direction, in my cell, a few hours after he had failed to get the note Mrs. Fontaine had.

"He lied to me consistently, has lied to me up to this very minute, saving he sent no bullet into Miss Newman' apartment the night she was shot.

"But I know now he did. I know it because he had it on the end of his tongue to tell us here that Senator Thaver had been attacked by that forged note, the one I had forged at his direction; that he, Conrad, might be assailed in the same way; and that, if this communication bullet contained a note done apparently by his hand, you must allow him the defence allowed to the senator: victimized by forgery!

"And he intended to go further, to say and apparently to prove that I did all this forging did it to hide my guilt as a German agent. He intended to go still further, to say that I had done it to show him up falsely, to brand him as a spy for the Germans.

"I do that now!"

For another brief space of time David Gower had his past under his feet; rose above the selfwreckage of the years.

Felix gave him a contemptuous stare. Here was the greatest feat in Conrad's life: that, in face of this terrific abuse — following, too, Thayer's speech and Mrs. Fontaine's testimony — he could discount so heavily what was said against him.

By his demeanour alone, he weakened Gower's recrimination. His serenity blunted the point of it. His suavity turned its edge.

Gower, his glance always on Hastings, his outstretched hand marking his employer, declared:

"This man, this Conrad, is a traitor, a spy, the paid agent of Germans — the Germans who bought his business and today are paying him hugely!

"I know, because with evidence of forgery against me he has taken me into his villainy. I confess it; and, in my confession, am a better man than he—if there are degrees in shame.

"Senator Thayer's description was in the main accurate. You will find in that bullet instructions to the woman, in Conrad's writing. And you can identify it by this: its first mark or character is the numeral, the figure seven, and the last is the figure seven — according to a system of making known the authority of the spy speaking or writing."

He paused again, staring with big and burning eyes at Hastings, the hand with which he pointed to Conrad rising and falling a distance of more than a foot. No part of him was quiet, or at rest. He looked like clothes hung on a line and lashed by the wind.

"I've identified myself to you. I stand self-confessed: dope-fiend, crook and spy.

"But Conrad?" He steadied the weak, irresolute arm to point upward. "May God strike me down if he's not a worse man than I! Crooks, with an irony as bitter as their punishment, have a code—'honour among thieves.'

"I've run true to that. When I struck hands with a man, I struck for keeps and on the level. When he struck, his tongue was in his cheek, laughing at the fool crazy enough to trust him with secrets.

"I mean, he betrayed those to whom he had sold himself.

"Paid by the Kaiser, and in the confidence of the Kaiser's entourage, he misused their spy system in this country — used it to gather state and business secrets wanted by those who today are plotting for the overthrow of Kaiser and junkers. When he did that, he touched a bottom to which I, I even, could not sink without a protest!

"You have the real Conrad at last — stripped of his polished, smiling —"

The narrative broke there.

Gower swayed forward and back; the weak

arm dropped, limp, to his side; his eyes closed slowly, with a fine quivering in the lids; he put a hand to his collar. He sank into his chair, his back arched, his limbs loose.

Hastings went to his side, put a hand on his shoulder, felt the peculiar softness of the body.

Conrad's contained, cold voice broke the silence:

"A diseased body harbouring a ruined brain. And yet, you gentlemen listen—give him the audience you refuse me—refuse me in the very act of showing, beyond question, that he shot the woman!"

Gower's unnatural, rumbling words met that comment.

"Conrad — Conrad and myself — nine-thirty."

If they had doubted him before, the frank repulsion now in his unconscious speech persuaded them that disbelief was impossible.

Hastings felt the body stiffen to the call of returning consciousness. Gower opened his eyes.

"After this — er — farce-comedy," the chief of police made sarcastic suggestion, "suppose we deal with reality."

Hastings took the bullet from the paste-board box. It had retained practically its original shape.

He and Ross, working with tweezers, took off the "nose" of the bullet.

There was a cylindrical hollow inside. Ross, using his scarfpin, drew out of that a very small roll of thin paper, in size approximately three-fourths of a cigarette paper.

The police chief passed it to Jermane, who, his magnifying glass over his eye, studied it. He was longer with this than he had been with the note accusing the Thayers.

For nearly two minutes, there was no sound in this room save the heavy breathing of men in suspense.

"It begins with a seven," he said, still intent on the examination.

"All right!" Hastings said testily, after a long pause. "How does it end?"

"With a seven."

Thayer and the detective watched Conrad. His expression was one of unqualified boredom. Now and then he blew smoke spirals toward the ceiling.

"He can't be guilty!" thought Hastings, clinging to his theory.

"It says," Jermane resumed: "'Seven. Imperative call. Everything you can get on what Berlin can expect from Wil in return for ending war in forty-five days. Must answer additional. Other too meagre. Seven.'"

Jermane gave the paper to Hastings. Felix, under the gaze of every man in the room, renained a victim of ennui.

"Well," the detective asked, "what do you may, Jerry? Conrad's writing?"

" Conrad's — genuine."

The two words were a final blow to Hastings. It last he was forced to discard his theory that Hower had shot Zimony Newman; and that, in loing so, he had used a bullet containing forged Proof of Conrad's treachery, proof which would compel the inference that Conrad had done the thooting.

John Thayer, even in his own pleasure in findng his view correct, saw and partially compretended Hastings' distress.

It was greater than the senator had guessed. The detective was lamenting that his intuition had never before so misled him; that his analysis of evidence had never been so mistaken. He shought again of his age: his ability was on the vane! He had come to the level of Ross; had lost maginative power; had worn out his originality!

It was Felix who broke the pause following Jermane's statement.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, slightly smiling as he pushed a bell-button, "you'll forgive me, I know, if—" He looked at his watch. "— I suggest I've work to do."

Whipple opened the hall door.

"The servant will see to your hats.—G morning."

He put his hand on the "catch" of the st doors. Hastings, about to demand his ar was forestalled by Gower, who turned u Ross:

"Major, I ask Felix Conrad's arrest, here now, for the shooting of Miss Newman!

"Look at that bullet, Mr. Hastings!—th fling on it, the marks of the 'threading' of barrel out of which it was fired. No revolver had that barrel, that 'screw-thread which gives the bullet a spinning motion.

"It was never fired from a revolver. It was fired at all! It was propelled into the wom head by, and from, an air-gun. And Conra alone — knew where that air-gun was the n of the shooting."

Felix laughed lightly, bowing to the otl and pushed the doors apart.

"That's right!" Hastings exclaimed. "bullet never came out of a revolver."

Conrad was standing between the door hand on the edge of each. Gower, like a pal man, confronted him.

"Laugh!" he said, his voice shrill. "Lau Your time for it is damned short. Yo thought, you think now, I won't go through

THE STORY GOWER TOLD

this! This time you're wrong. You've lost me — for good and all.

- "Immelvier remember him?
- "And your sending me to steal the portfolio from Number Thirty-five recall that?
 - "Wilhelm remember him?
- "And the Dieselm deal that come back to you? Why don't you see the fun in it now? You did, once. Why don't you laugh?"

Conrad's smile had disappeared. At the mention of Dieselm, his eyes swept the group with a glance that had in it the gleam of cunning, as if he weighed an evil idea.

"Suicide!" thought Hastings, and immediately changed his mind. "Not nerve enough for that."

Finding no sympathy in the faces before him, Felix stared at Gower.

The drug-fiend, his whole strength and weight thrown into his shoulders and head, gave all he had to the business of maniac denunciation. Wildness possessed him. He was caught up like a cork on the flood of his own avenging thoughts.

"Rechtiefen and Pauline — Glotz and Gretchen. Remember those, the two women: the night at the bridge; not the men, but the women. Your excuse was —"

Conrad pushed the doors farther apart. Gower laughed, a nervous defiance.

"You'll not leave! You're afraid to run! If I require it—" He put up a clenched hand, and laughed again, exultant. "— if I say so, you'll plead guilty now! If you don't, I'll remind you of something you think—in your colossal, German stupidity you think—I never knew!"

He crouched forward, his body at such an angle that he had to stretch his long, sinuous neck and turn his face upward to meet Conrad's eyes.

"Gertrude Mullenhof," he said. "Remember what you did to Gertrude Mullenhof?"

Felix broke at last.

His lower lip fell away from the upper. The pink, smooth cheeks collapsed, changing to the yellow of old parchment, as the blood drained from them. A multitude of little lines clawed at his eyes.

Gower snapped forefinger against thumb and turned away, his glance seeking and holding Hastings' gaze.

"Gentlemen," he said, pointing over his shoulder to the man who for years had driven him, "a study in penitence!"

He was still greatly agitated. A collection of jerking nerves, he worried the detective with his constant stare. The old man tried to get something definite out of the smiling stare.

What was its meaning? Ah, he had it—triumph!—the mean elation the crook feels in putting over a cherished revenge.

Then an unexpected thing happened. Hastings once more paid court to instinct. He believed again in Gower's guilt.

He went closer to Gower, with slow steps, with a deliberation and calmness that made him seem the special agent of destiny. He felt within himself a new power, an unexpected confidence in the working of his mental mechanisms.

His scrutiny under the rims of his spectacles had an extraordinary keenness. Those about him sensed his transformation from cool, logical thought to ardent, irresistible emotion. Although his movement was slow, he had the appearance of swooping toward the man.

Gower's smile changed to nervous laughter. Others laughed a little, without knowing why.

Gower's laughter rose above theirs. Even when Hastings' face was within a yard of his, he laughed.

Forced and slight at first, the strange gaiety became a gale of unnatural mirth.

The gale gathered momentum, grew into storm. Gower was again a mass of garments lashed by the hurricane of his emotions.

His widely opened mouth, his head thrown

back — perhaps, in mockery of Hastings — his tongue lolling behind and over his teeth, his neck twisted and elongated, showed how his self-control went down before the detective's searching gaze.

His hysterical noise bordered now on the horrible. Marcello sprang forward and pummeled him on the back. Several of the group started out.

"Wait!" Hastings halted them, his eyes holding Gower. "This fellow's got something else on his mind — something we want."

Whipple closed the hall door. Felix, looking very old, stood between the study doors.

Gower tried to be quiet, had the appearance of choking. He gulped enormously, put a hand to his mouth, at last was nearly still. He sank into a chair, panting, weak. But for his eyes, he seemed a normal man exhausted by unusual exertion.

"All right!" ordered Hastings, towering above him. "Come on with it!"

"With - what?"

"What you were about to say when this giggling fit hit you.— Come on! I saw it!"

Gower shivered, as if he felt cold; but he did not answer.

Hasting: was inexorable -- confident.

"Come on! — I saw it in your eyes."

There was a long moment of absolute silence before Gower spoke:

"Yep.—You saw it." He scowled, but those who watched him saw submission in his face. His voice was flat, indifferent. "Yep! You 'got' me.—But get this: Conrad wrote the message to Zimony Newman.

"He'd been leary of revolvers ever since that Chicago case, the Doppelein woman caught because the silencer didn't work, left the flame visible. So he got the air-gun. He'd take no risks.

"That night he had the message in the bullet; and he stood at my side as I discharged it. I always did that for him. My eyes are good.

"The lights were not on in her living room, but there was the strong reflection from the bedroom lights, and I saw her, saw Zimony Newman, as she stood at the mantel, and — and —"

He grated his teeth, pushed himself forward to the edge of the chair and put out his hands, the fingers bent, like half-hooks, or claws. His face, already displayed to them in the pattern of depravity, mirrored a culminating baseness. It was as if he libelled himself.

"She'd snapped her fingers in my face, laughed at me — she's got the worst laugh I ever heard, blood-curdling — I shot! I shot to kill. I'd have killed her if I'd known my own death

was to follow hers by a minute. And — I hit her."

"That all?" Hastings persisted.

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The old man was grim. It was the only time Thayer had seen him entirely unsoftened by a desire to be kind. The sight was impressive. He never forgot it.

"All," Gower replied, his slow smile insolvent.
"You get Conrad, treason — me, murder.—
Here's an end."

Every man in the room turned to note the effect of this on Conrad. They were disappointed.

Unobserved during Gower's recital, he had gone into his study and closed the sliding doors behind him.

$\mathbf{X}\mathbf{X}\mathbf{V}$

SPLENDOURS OF ROMANCE

HE dark grey of a March twilight was outside. Hastings looked down the long line of Sixteenth Street, suddenly hung with a double row of white globes as the street lights were flashed on. Rosalie, also gazing into the murky weather, could not break the silence.

Hastings had come in, more than an hour ago, "for just five minutes, not an instant longer, to say good-bye." During the hour, several times his eyes had brought her close to panic — his admiration evident, his affection like actual worship. Afraid of the foolishness of tears, she had employed gaiety as an emotional defence. But now —

He was reviewing mentally the past seven months: particularly how she, refusing any part of the Conrad fortune, had found work and made this little apartment her home.

There had been, too, after Zimony Newman's death, Felix Conrad's end, illness cheating the rifles or the prison: and Gower's punishment, lib-

erating him from a world in which he had not known how to live.

The old man considered affairs more pleasant: the announcement, now a month old, that Rosalie Conrad and John Thayer were to be married on the fifth of March, the day after the adjournment of Congress. Hastings had realized with what unfailing courage and incommunicable suffering Rosalie had come through these long months, in the end a lovelier character. He had seen it all and applauded it, strengthened her, without so much as the utterance of a single word.

He had, she told John, the genius of friend-ship: loyalty without boundaries.

When she did speak now, her voice shook.

"You said just now John and I had showed you the splendours of romance. You're mistaken. You showed them to us."

"Don't make fun of me," he said, laughing.

His refusal to take himself seriously hurt her.

"Ah, old friend of ours, don't laugh that way! You're among the Greathearts—Greathearts who serve people, and guide them to higher places."

"I wish all that were true."

He put out his hands, found hers.

They sat that way, a long time.

"'Splendours of romance," he repeated at

last. "Your love of him, and his for you: another brilliant proof that a love without sacrifice is never real love. Think what the love of you two has overcome!

"That was one of the splendours; and now, this: you and he will be married tomorrow evening and begin your trip around the world, meet and know the rulers of men, study the laws under which unnumbered people live and go to their daily tasks—all because John Thayer's an authority on commerce, and the President, needing a man with such a gift, has asked him for a report on trade conditions the world over! That's great!

"And you, whose love has given him an inspiration he could never have had from any other woman, you will go with him. What a work!

"Splendours of romance? — In you and John I have seen them. That, of itself, is a glorious thing to your credit, greater than you know: you've proved to an old man the reality of those ideals, those ambitions — and ambition always gets its very breath and sustenance from romance — which, as a boy, he saw and felt.— Old age, my dear, seldom grows in optimism."

He was profoundly moved. She sought again the safety of shallower moods.

"Oh," she said, enthusiastic, "there's more than work ahead of us! There'll be fun, lots;

and the loveliest things; and wise men and women — pleasure everywhere!"

"There always is," he said, "for those who love, those who've found the one path to—"

She sprang to her feet, switched on the lights. "There's John!"

Hastings heard him now, his feet shuffling like a minstrel's on the parquet floor of the corridor. She left the room, hurried to the door. The dancing feet were inside the apartment — and exclamations, and whispering, and the two voices like those of people trained to depict joy.

She appeared in the doorway, the senator behind her, his face so utterly that of a careless, happy boy that Hastings laughed and explained why. "I've been reading all the stuff in the papers about your great wisdom — and here you are, a boy, a kid!"

Immediately, Thayer's face was solemn.

"That reminds me, old friend," he said, taking the chair between Hastings and Rosalie.
"I've had advice from all kinds of men, so much advice that my ear-drums are raw. So!" He struck the palm of his left hand with the rolled-up newspaper he carried. "I'd like a little common sense from you."

"Farm products are always in demand."

"It's this blessed secretary business! It's worried me to death. And I want one real idea

free of 'my friend Jones, he's the man!' or 'that fellow Smith, no good at all!'— If I can't find the man I need, I'll fall down on the trip!"

He spoke with all his force and fire, making more explicit the difficulties of his position.

"The secretary on this job isn't confined to writing letters and accepting invitations. He's just as important, or unimportant, as I am. You know who the applicants are? Who tops the list? Which one's the best man?"

"Who? Let me think. There's Creighton — he's done fine work. I was thinking of him —"

"Won't do! Creighton values Creighton too highly."

"Let me think again."

Hastings rose, went to the window, stared into the murk.

He was proud of Thayer's having appealed to him. He would have liked to feel that he had had a part, even so slight a part as this, in the senator's work. If he made a sound recommendation, this work would be helped immensely.

He considered the list of possibilities.

Thayer went up to the old man; stood, unheard, behind him a moment; put one hand on his shoulder, and with the other spread out the newspaper.

"Your guessing's too slow, old friend of ours,"

he said in a tone of gentle remonstrance, and thrust the paper between Hastings' face and the window. "There's my choice—and don't you knock him!—He goes!"

The old man, without a look at the paper, caught the senator's hand and pumped it up and down, "farmer fashion"—congratulating him in jerky phrases between pumps.

"Always fooling me, son! — But I'm glad you've picked him. Who is he? — Good man?"

"See for yourself!"

Thayer crowded the paper into his hand.

Hastings, looking down, saw the announcement in big type that stretched across the whole of the front page, and under the type a photograph spreading the appointee's features over the width of three columns. The headlines said:

"THAYER'S SECRETARY JEFFERSON HASTINGS — Man Who Solved Melwood Mystery Will Help Senator in Monumental Task Assigned by President —"

A smile twitched the corners of the old man's lips. Looking at Rosalie over the steel rims of his spectacles, he saw the tears of happiness in her eyes. His lips moved. He turned away abruptly.

He stood, close to the window, silent a long

time, the city's lights blurred and broken into all the colours of the rainbow as he stared at them through misty eyes.

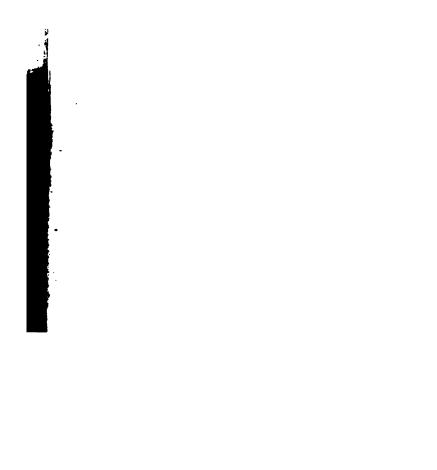
He put a fore-arm against the window sash and pillowed his forehead on it. They thought he sighed.

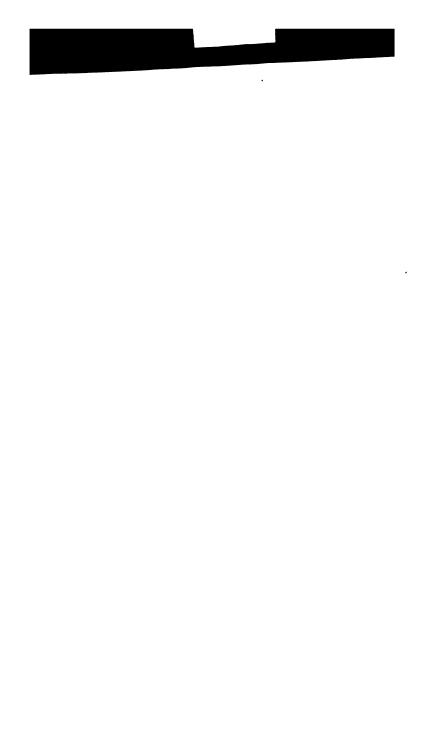
Thayer, his mind full of phrases of affection for the old man, found himself afraid to speak — knew, he explained afterwards, "I'd blubber like a fool!"

"Splendours of romance!" Hastings said at last, his voice low, and shaken. "You children have achieved the greatest of them all, this: showing that an old man may see that the road ahead of him is still all gold, and that the sunlight is on it for ever like wine, and that the flowers along the way are lovelier even than those he dreamed of when he was a boy."

As he turned toward them, they saw that his face was a benediction.

THE END









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